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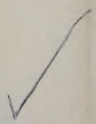
M. L.

Chaplet of pearls

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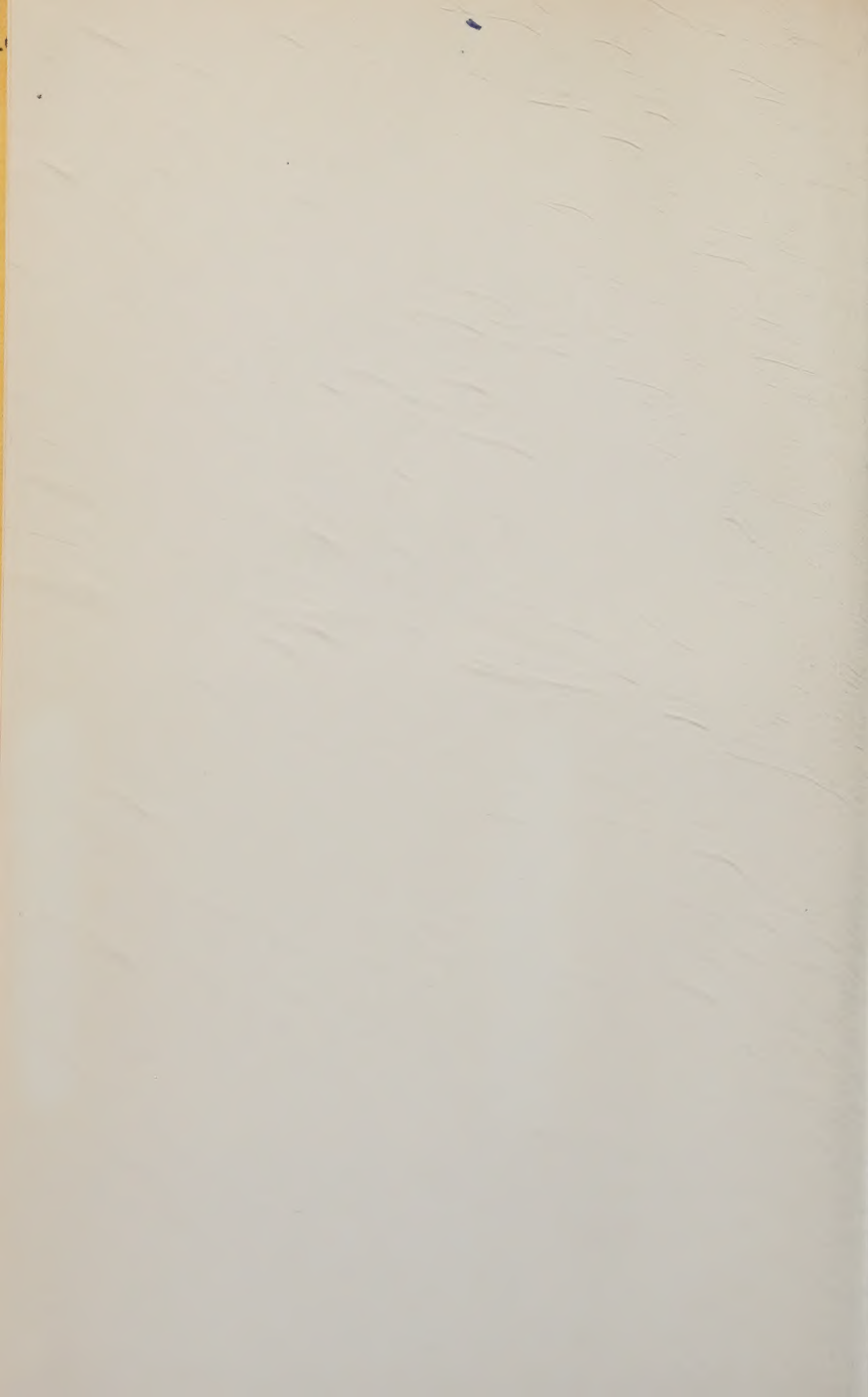


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THE CHAPLET OF PEARLS

or

The White and Black Ribaumont



“ I FIGHT AS ONE WHO HAS SOMETHING TO FIGHT FOR ”

(See page 256)

THE CHAPLET OF PEARLS

OR
The White and Black Ribaumont

BY
C. M. YONGE
EDITED AND CONDENSED BY
R. D. CHAMBERLIN

WITH A FRONTISPIECE IN FULL COLOR BY
RAY C. STRANG
AND OTHER ILLUSTRATIONS BY HAZEL IVES



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L. C. PAGE & COMPANY
BOSTON :: PUBLISHERS

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Made in U. S. A.

First Impression, July, 1926

PRINTED BY C. H. SIMONDS COMPANY
BOSTON, MASS., U. S. A.

474352

INTRODUCTION

Not only does this famous romance picture better, perhaps, than any book now before the public, the daily life of the sixteenth century, and give a faithful and unprejudiced account of some of the great historical events of that period; but, as a story, it is noteworthy for its brilliant plot and thrilling episodes.

Many, in the present era of democracy, have conceived the royalty of by-gone days as a product of an artificial atmosphere. Therefore, it is almost a shock to meet them at such close quarters, in this story, and to discover that they are subject to all the weaknesses, and whims, or lovable and companionable impulses of ordinary individuals. In particular, the desire of young King Charles IX. of France to be popular, and the efforts of his mother, Catherine de Medici, to thwart his plans, and the friendship that springs up between young Berenger, the hero of the story, and Henry of Navarre, bring home to us the realization that kings are but human, and that human nature remains fundamentally unchanged throughout the passing of centuries.

The original text of *THE CHAPLET OF PEARLS*, like most fiction of the time, was very verbose and included minute details of description and explanation. Furthermore, the continuity and movement of the main plot was constantly interrupted by the injection of minor plots and incidents, having little connection with the main theme.

In preparing this new edition, I have thought that

the reading public would prefer that such superfluous matter should be eliminated, in order that the book might be reduced to a more normal length; and, with that thought in view, I have discarded a great deal of material that appeared to me unessential for the thorough enjoyment of the story. In doing this, I have taken great pains to retain the original text, with only such negligible changes as had been required by the deletion of so much unnecessary material.

R. D. CHAMBERLIN.

July 2d, 1926.

PREFACE TO ORIGINAL EDITION

It is the fashion to call every story controversial that deals with times when controversy or a war of religion was raging; but it should be remembered that there are some which only attempt to portray human feelings as affected by the events that such warfare occasioned. "Old Mortality" and "Woodstock" are not controversial tales, and the "Chaplet of Pearls" is so quite as little. It aims only at drawing certain scenes and certain characters as the convulsions of the sixteenth century may have affected them, and is, in fact, like all historical romance, the shaping of the conceptions that the imagination must necessarily form when dwelling upon the records of history. That faculty which might be called the passive fancy, and might almost be described in Portia's song,—

"It is engendered in the eyes,
By *reading* fed—and there it dies,"—

that faculty, I say, has learnt to feed upon character and incident, and to require that the latter should be effective and exciting. Is it not reasonable to seek for this in the days when such things were not infrequent, and did not imply exceptional wickedness or misfortune in those engaged in them? This seems to me one plea for the historical novel, to which I would add the opportunity that it gives for study of the times and delineation of characters. Shakespeare's Henry IV. and Henry V., Scott's Louis XI., Manzoni's Federigo Borromeo, Bulwer's Harold, James's Philip Augustus,

are all real contributions to our comprehension of the men themselves, by calling the chronicles and memoirs into action. True, the picture cannot be exact, and is sometimes distorted—nay, sometimes praiseworthy efforts at correctness in the detail take away whatever might have been lifelike in the outline. Yet, acknowledging all this, I must still plead for the tales that presumptuously deal with days gone by, as enabling the young to realize history vividly—and, what is still more desirable, requiring an effort of the mind which to read of modern days does not. The details of Millais' *Inquisition* or of his *Huguenot* may be in error in spite of all his study and diligence, but they have brought before us for ever the horrors of the *auto-da-fé*, and the patient, steadfast heroism of the man who can smile aside his wife's endeavour to make him tacitly betray his faith to save his life. Surely it is well, by pen as by picture, to go back to the past for figures that will stir the heart like these, even though the details be as incorrect as those of the revolt of Liège or of La Ferrette in *Quentin Durward* and *Anne of Geierstein*.

Scott, however, wilfully carved history to suit the purpose of his story; and in these days we have come to feel that a story must earn a certain amount of credibility by being in keeping with established facts, even if striking events have to be sacrificed, and that the order of time must be preserved. In Shakespeare's days, or even in Scott's, it might have been possible to bring Henry III. and his minions to due punishment within the limits of a tale beginning with the Massacre of St. Bartholomew; but in 1868 the broad outlines of tragedy must be given up to keep within the bounds of historical verity.

How far this has been done, critics better read than myself must decide. I have endeavoured to speak

fairly, to the best of my ability, of such classes of persons as fell in with the course of the narrative, according to such lights as the memoirs of the time afford. The Convent is scarcely a *class* portrait, but the condition of it seems to be justified by hints in the Port Royal memoirs, respecting Maubuisson and others which Mère Angélique reformed. The intolerance of the ladies at Montauban is described in Madame Duplessis-Mornay's life; and if Berenger's education and opinions are looked on as not sufficiently alien from Roman Catholicism, a reference to Froude's "History of Queen Elizabeth" will show both that the customs of the elder English Church were still kept up by many of the country clergy, and likewise that a broad distinction was made by the better informed among the French between Calvinism and Protestantism or Lutheranism, in which they included Anglicanism. The minister Gardon I do not consider as representing his class. He is a *possibility* modified to serve the purpose of the story.

Into historical matters, however, I have entered only so far as my story became involved with them. And here I have to apologize for a few blunders, detected too late for alteration even in the volumes. Sir Francis Walsingham was a young rising statesman in 1572, instead of the elderly sage he is represented; his daughter Frances was a mere infant, and Sir Philip Sidney was not knighted till much later. For the rest, I have tried to show the scenes that shaped themselves before me as carefully as I could; though of course they must be not a presentiment of the times themselves, but of my notion of them.

C. M. YONGE.

November 14th, 1868.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE BRIDAL OF THE WHITE AND BLACK	1
II. THE SEPARATION	7
III. THE FAMILY COUNCIL	18
IV. TITHONUS	26
V. THE CONVENT BIRD	48
VI. FOULLY COZENED	55
VII. THE QUEEN'S PASTORAL	69
VIII. "LE BROUILLON"	84
IX. THE WEDDING WITH CRIMSON FAVOURS	93
X. MONSIEUR'S BALLET	102
XI. THE KING'S TRAGEDY	113
XII. THE PALACE OF SLAUGHTER	121
XIII. THE BRIDEGROOM'S ARRIVAL	125
XIV. SWEET HEART	133
XV. THE MOONBEAM	139
XVI. THE EMPTY CRADLE	148
XVII. THE ORPHANS OF LA SABLIERIE	153
XVIII. IN THE KING'S NAME	158
XIX. THE ITALIAN PEDLAR	175
XX. SPELL AND POTION	185
XXI. BEATING AGAINST THE BARS	190
XXII. THE ENEMY IN PRESENCE	197
XXIII. THE PEDLAR'S PREDICTION	208
XXIV. THE SANDS OF OLONNE	220
XXV. OUR LADY OF HOPE	234
XXVI. THE SILVER BULLET	245
XXVII. LE BAISER D'EUSTACIE	266
XXVIII. THE GALLIMAFRE	281
XXIX. THE MOONBEAM CHILD	298

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
" 'I FIGHT AS ONE WHO HAS SOMETHING TO FIGHT FOR.' " (See page 256) . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
"THEY LOOKED LIKE A FULL-GROWN COUPLE SEEN THROUGH A DIMINISHING GLASS"	2
" 'NO BLAME FOR BEING WITH THY HUSBAND,' HE ANSWERED, CLASPING HER HAND"	59
"EUSTACIE SHRANK FROM HER, AND TRIED TO AVOID A PRIVATE INTERVIEW"	95
"SHE STOOD INTENTLY LISTENING FOR VERONIQUE'S STEP"	120
"A LOW HILL, ON THE SUMMIT OF WHICH STOOD A CHATEAU"	161
"BERENGER, WALKING WITH SWIFT STRIDES, SUP- PORTING OSBERT ON HIS HORSE"	215
"THE FIGHTING WAS HOT AND DESPERATE"	240
"SET FORTH ON HORSEBACK . . . , RAYONETTE BEING PERCHED BY TURNS IN FRONT OF HER FATHER OR MOTHER"	281

THE CHAPLET OF PEARLS

OR

THE WHITE AND BLACK RIBAUMONT

CHAPTER I

THE BRIDAL OF THE WHITE AND BLACK

"Small was the ring, and small in truth the finger:
What then? the faith was large that dropped it down."
AUBREY DE VERE, *Infant Bridal*.

SETTING aside the consideration of the risk, the baby-weddings of the Middle Ages must have been very pretty sights.

So the Court of France thought the bridal of Henri Béranger Eustache de Ribaumont and of Marie Eustacie Rosalie de Ribaumont du Nid-de-Merle, when, amid the festivals that accompanied the signature of the treaty of Cateau-Cambresis, good-natured King Henri II. presided merrily at the union of the little pair, whose united ages did not reach ten years.

There they stood under the portal of Notre-Dame, the little bridegroom in a white velvet coat, with puffed sleeves, slashed with scarlet satin, as were the short, also puffed breeches meeting his long white knitted silk stockings some way above the knee; large scarlet rosettes were in his white shoes, a scarlet knot adorned his little sword, and his velvet cap of the same colour bore a long white plume, and was encircled by

a row of pearls of priceless value. They were no other than that garland of pearls which, after a night of personal combat before the walls of Calais, Edward III. of England took from his helmet and presented to Sir Eustache de Ribeaumont, a knight of Picardy, bidding him say everywhere that it was a gift from the King of England to the bravest of knights.

The precious heirlooms were scarcely held with the respect due to an ornament so acquired. The manly garb for the first time assumed by his sturdy legs, and the possession of the little sword, were evidently the most interesting parts of the affair to the youthful husband, who seemed to find in them his only solace for the weary length of the ceremony. He was a fine, handsome little fellow, fair and rosy, with bright blue eyes, and hair like shining flax, unusually tall and strong-limbed for his age; and as he gave his hand to his little bride, and walked with her under a canopy up to kneel at the High Altar, for the marriage blessing and the mass, they looked like a full-grown couple seen through a diminishing-glass.

The little bride was perhaps a less beautiful child, but she had a splendid pair of black eyes, and a sweet little mouth, both set into the uncomprehending solemnity of baby gravity and contentment in fine clothes. In accordance with the vow indicated by her name of Marie, her dress was white and blue, turquoise forget-me-nots bound the little lace veil on her dark chestnut hair, the bosom of her white satin dress was sprinkled with the same azure jewel, and turquoises bordered every seam of the sweeping skirt with a train befitting a count's daughter, and meandered in gorgeous constellations round the hem. The little thing lisped her own vows forth without much notion of their sense, and indeed was sometimes prompted by her bridesmaid cousin, a pretty little girl a year older, who thrust in



"THEY LOOKED LIKE A FULL-GROWN COUPLE SEEN
THROUGH A DIMINISHING GLASS"

her assistance so glibly that the King, as well as others of the spectators, laughed, and observed that she would get herself married to the boy instead of her cousin.

There was, however, to be no doubt nor mistake about Béranger and Eustacie de Ribaumont being man and wife. Every ceremony, religious or domestic, that could render a marriage valid, was gone through with real earnestness, although with infinite gaiety, on the part of the court. Much depended on their union, and the reconciliation of the two branches of the family had long been a favourite scheme of King Henri II.

Both alike were descended from Anselme de Ribaumont, renowned in the first Crusade, and from the brave Picard who had received the pearls; but, in the miserable anarchy of Charles VI.'s reign, the elder brother had been on the Burgundian side—like most of the other nobles of Picardy—and had thus been brought into the English camp, where, regarding Henry V. as lawfully appointed to the succession, and much admiring him and his brother Bedford, he had become an ardent supporter of the English claim. He had married an English lady, and had received the grant of the castle of Leurre in Normandy by way of compensation for his ancestral one of Ribaumont in Picardy, which had been declared to be forfeited by his treason, and seized by his brother.

This brother had always been an Armagnac, and had risen and thriven with his party—before the final peace between France and England obliged the elder line to submit to Charles VII. Since that time there had been a perpetual contention as to the restitution of Château Ribaumont, a strife which under Louis XI. had become an endless lawsuit; and in the days of duelling had occasioned a good many insults and private encounters. The younger branch, or Black Ribaumonts, had received a grant from Louis XI. of the

lands of Nid-de-Merle, belonging to an unfortunate Angevin noble, who had fallen under the royal displeasure, and they had enjoyed court favour up to the present generation, when Henri II., either from opposition to his father, instinct for honesty, or both, had become a warm friend to the gay and brilliant young Baron de Ribaumont, head of the white or elder branch of the family.

The family contention seemed likely to wear out of its own accord, for the Count de Ribaumont was an elderly and childless man, and his brother, the Chevalier de Ribaumont, was, according to the usual lot of French juniors, a bachelor, so that it was expected that the whole inheritance would centre upon the elder family. However, to the general surprise, the Chevalier late in life married, and became the father of a son and daughter; but soon after calculations were still more thrown out by the birth of a little daughter in the old age of the Count.

Almost from the hour in which her sex was announced, the King had promised the Baron de Ribaumont that she should be the wife of his young son, and that all the possessions of the house should be settled upon the little couple, engaging to provide for the Chevalier's disappointed heir in some commandery of a religious order of knighthood.

The Baron's wife was English. He had, when on a visit to his English kindred, entirely turned the head of the lovely Annora Walwyn, and finding that her father, one of the gravest of Tudor statesmen, would not hear of her breaking her engagement to the honest Dorset squire Marmaduke Thistlewood, he had carried her off by a stolen marriage and *coup de main*, which, as her beauty, rank, and inheritance were all considerable, had won him great reputation at the gay court of Henri II.

Infants as the boy and girl were, the King had hurried on their marriage to secure its taking place in the lifetime of the Count. The Countess had died soon after the birth of the little girl, and if the arrangement were to take effect at all, it must be before she should fall under the guardianship of her uncle, the Chevalier. Therefore the King had caused her to be brought up from the cottage in Anjou, where she had been nursed, and in person superintended the brilliant wedding. He himself led off the dance with the tiny bride, conducting her through its mazes with fatherly kindness and condescension; but Queen Catherine, who was strongly in the interests of the Angevin branch, and had always detested the Baron as her husband's intimate, excused herself from dancing with the bridegroom. He therefore fell to the share of the Dauphiness Queen of Scots, a lovely, bright-eyed, laughing girl, who so completely fascinated the little fellow, that he convulsed the court by observing that he should not have objected to be married to some one like her, instead of a little baby like Eustacie.

Amid all the mirth, it was not only the Chevalier and the Queen who bore displeased looks. In truth, both were too great adepts in court life to let their dissatisfaction appear. The gloomiest face was that of him whose triumph it was—the bridegroom's father, the Baron de Ribaumont. He had suffered severely from the sickness that prevailed in St. Quentin, when in the last August the Admiral de Coligny had been besieged there by the Spaniards, and all agreed that he had never been the same man since, either in health or in demeanor. When he came back from his captivity and found the King bent on crowning his return by the marriage of the children, he had hung back, spoken of scruples about such unconscious vows, and

had finally only consented under stress of the personal friendship of the King, and on condition that he and his wife should at once have the sole custody of the little bride. Even then he moved about the gay scene with so distressed and morose an air that he was evidently either under the influence of a scruple of conscience or of a foreboding of evil.

No one doubted that it had been the latter, when, three days later, Henri II., in the prime of his strength and height of his spirits, encountered young Des Lorges in the lists, received the splinter of a lance in his eye, and died two days afterwards.

No sooner were his obsequies over than the Baron de Ribaumont set off with his wife and the little bridal pair for his castle of Leurre, in Normandy, nor was he ever seen at court again.

CHAPTER II

THE SEPARATION

"Parted without the least regret,
Except that they had ever met.

* * * *

Misses, the tale that I relate,
This lesson seems to carry:
Choose not alone a proper mate,
But proper time to marry!"

COWPER, *Pairing Time anticipated.*

"**I** WILL have it!"

"Thou shalt not have it!"

"Diane says it is mine."

"Diane knows nothing about it."

"Gentlemen always yield to ladies."

"Wives ought to mind their husbands."

"Then I will not be thy wife."

"Thou canst not help it."

"I will. I will tell my father what M. le Baron reads and sings, and then I know he will."

"And welcome."

Eustacie put out her lip, and began to cry.

The "husband and wife," now eight and seven years old, were in a large room hung with tapestry, representing the history of Tobit. A great state bed, curtained with piled velvet, stood on a sort of daïs at the further end; there was a toilet-table adorned with curiously shaped boxes, and coloured Venetian glasses, and filagree pouncet-boxes, and with a small mirror whose frame was inlaid with gold and ivory. A large coffer, likewise inlaid, stood against the wall, and near

it a cabinet, of Dutch workmanship, a combination of ebony, ivory, wood, and looking-glass, the centre retreating, and so arranged that by the help of most ingenious attention to perspective and reflection, it appeared like the entrance to a magnificent miniature cinque-cento palace, with steps up to a vestibule paved in black and white lozenges, and with three endless corridors diverging from it. So much for show; for use, this palace was a bewildering complication of secret drawers and pigeon-holes, all depending indeed upon one tiny gold key; but unless the use of that key were well understood, all it led to was certain outer receptacles of fragrant Spanish gloves, knots of ribbon, and kerchiefs strewn over with rose leaves and lavender. However, Eustacie had secured the key, and was now far beyond these mere superficial matters. Her youthful lord had just discovered her mounted on a chair, her small person decked out with a profusion of necklaces, jewels, bracelets, chains, and rings; and her fingers, as well as they could under their stiffening load, were opening the very penetralia of the cabinet, the inner chamber of the hall, where lay a case adorned with the Ribaumont arms and containing the far-famed chaplet of pearls. It was almost beyond her reach, but she had risen on tip-toe, and was stretching out her hand for it, when he, springing behind her on the chair, availed himself of his superior height and strength to shut the door of this arcanum and turn the key. His mortifying permission to his wife to absent herself arose from pure love of teasing, but the next moment he added, still holding his hand on the key—"As to telling what my father reads, that would be treason. How shouldst thou know what it is?"

"Dost thou think everyone is an infant but thyself?"

"But who told thee that to talk of my father's books would get him into trouble?" continued the boy, as

they still stood together on the high heavy wooden chair.

She tossed her pretty head, and pretended to pout.

"Was it Diane? I will know. Didst thou tell Diane?"

Instead of answering, now that his attention to the key was relaxed, Eustacie made a sudden dart, like a little wild cat, at the back of the chair and at the key. The chair overbalanced; Béranger caught at the front drawer of the cabinet, which, unlocked by Eustacie, came out in his hand, and chair, children, drawer, and curiosities all went rolling over together on the floor with a hubbub that brought all the household together, exclaiming and scolding. Madame de Ribaumont's displeasure at the rifling of her hoards knew no bounds; Eustacie, by way of defense, shrieked "like twenty demons;" Béranger, too honourable to accuse her, underwent the same tempest; and at last both were soundly rapped over the knuckles with the long handle of Madame's fan, and consigned to two separate closets, to be dealt with on the return of M. le Baron, while Madame returned to her embroidery, lamenting the absence of that dear little Diane, whose late visit at the chateau had been marked by such unusual tranquillity between the children.

Béranger, in his dark closet, comforted himself with the shrewd suspicion that his father was so employed as not to be expected at home till supper time, and that his mother's wrath was by no means likely to be so enduring as to lead her to make complaints of the prisoners; and when he heard a trampling of horses in the court, he anticipated a speedy release and summons to show himself to the visitors. He waited long, however, before he heard the pattering of little feet; then a stool scraped along the floor, the button of his door was undone, the stool pushed back, and as he

emerged, Eustacie stood before him with her finger to her lip. "*Chut*, Béranger! It is my father and uncle, and Narcisse, and, oh! so many *gens d'armes*. They are come to summon M. le Baron to go with them to disperse the *prêche* by the Bac de l'Oie. And oh, Béranger, is he not there?"

"I do not know. He went out with his hawk, and I do not think he could have gone anywhere else. Did they say so to my mother?"

"Yes; but she never knows. And oh, Béranger, Narcisse told me—ah, was it to tease me?—that Diane has told them all they wanted to know, for that they sent her here on purpose to see if we were not all Huguenots."

"Very likely, the little viper! Let me pass, Eustacie. I must go and tell my father."

"Thou canst not get out that way; the court is full of men-at-arms. Hark, there's Narcisse calling me. He will come after me."

There was not a moment to lose. Béranger flew along a corridor, and down a narrow winding stair, and across the kitchen; then snatching at the arm of a boy of his own age whom he met at the door, he gasped out, "Come and help me catch Follet, Landry!" and still running across an orchard, he pulled down a couple of apples from the trees, and bounded into a paddock where a small rough Breton pony was feeding among the little tawny Norman cows. The animal knew his little master, and trotted towards him at his call of "Follet, Follet. Now be a wise Follet, and play me no tricks. Thou and I, Follet, shall do good service, if thou wilt be steady."

Follet made his advances, but with a coquettish eye and look, as if ready to start away at any moment.

"Soh, Follet. I have no bread for thee, only two apples; but, Follet, listen. There's my *beau-père* the

Count, and the Chevalier, all spite, and their whole troop of savage *gens d'armes*, come out to fall upon the poor Huguenots, who are doing no harm at all, only listening to a long dull sermon. And I am much afraid my father is there, for he went out with his hawk on his wrist, and he never does take Ysonde for any real sport, as thou and I would do, Follet. He says it is all vanity of vanities. But thou know'st, if they caught him at the *prêche* they would call it heresy and treason, and all sorts of horrors, and any way they would fall like demons on the poor Huguenots, Jacques and all—thine own Jacques, Follet. Come, be a loyal pony, Follet. Be at least as good as Eustacie."

Follet was evidently attentive to this peroration, turning round his ear in a sensible attitude, and advancing his nose to the apples. As Béranger held them out to him, the other boy clutched his shaggy forelock so effectually that the start back did not shake him off, and the next moment Béranger was on his back.

"And I, Monsieur, what shall I do?"

"Thou, Landry? I know. Speed like a hare, lock the avenue gate, and hide the key. That will delay them a long time. Off now, Follet."

Béranger and Follet understood one another far too well to care about such trifles as saddle and bridle, and off they went through green grassy baulks dividing the fields, or across the stubble, till, about three miles from the castle, they came to a narrow valley, dipping so suddenly between the hills that it could hardly have been suspected by one unaware of its locality, and the sides were dotted with copse wood, which entirely hid the bottom. Béranger guided his pony to a winding path that led down the steep side of the valley, already hearing the cadence of a loud, chanting voice, throwing out its sounds over the assembly, whence arose assenting hums over an undercurrent of sobs, as

though the excitable French assembly were strongly affected.

The thicket was so close that Béranger was almost among the congregation before he could see more than a passing glimpse of a sea of heads. Stout, ruddy, Norman peasants, and high white-capped women, mingled with a few soberly-clad townsfolk, almost all with the grave, stedfast cast of countenance imparted by unresisted persecution, stood gathered round the green mound that served as a natural pulpit for a Calvinist minister, who wore the dress of a burgher, but entirely black. To Béranger's despair, he was in the act of inviting his hearers to join with him in singing one of Marot's psalms; and the boy, eager to lose not a moment, grasped the skirt of the outermost of the crowd. The man, an absorbed-looking stranger, merely said, "Importune me not, child."

"Listen!" said Béranger; "it imports——"

"Peace," was the stern answer; but a Norman farmer looked round at that moment, and Béranger exclaimed, "Stop the singing! The *gens d'armes*!" The psalm broke off; the whisper circulated; the words "from Leurre" were next conveyed from lip to lip, and, as it were in a moment, the dense human mass had broken up and vanished, stealing through the numerous paths in the brushwood, or along the brook, as it descended through tall sedges and bulrushes. The valley was soon as lonely as it had been populous; the pulpit remained a mere mossy bank, more suggestive of fairy dances than of Calvinist sermons, and no one remained on the scene save Béranger with his pony, Jacques the groom, a stout farmer, the preacher, and a tall thin figure in the plainest dark cloth dress that could be worn by a gentleman, a hawk on his wrist.

"Thou here, my boy!" he exclaimed, as Béranger

came to his side; and as the little fellow replied in a few brief words, he took him by the hand, and said to the minister, "Good Master Isaac, let me present my young son to you, who under Heaven hath been the means of saving many lives this day."

Maitre Isaac Gardon, a noted preacher, looked kindly at the boy's fair face, and said, "Bless thee, young sir. As thou hast been already a chosen instrument to save life, so mayest thou be ever after a champion of the truth."

"Monsieur le Baron," interposed Jacques, "it were best to look to yourself. I already hear sounds upon the wind."

"And you, good sir?" said the Baron.

"I will see to him," said the farmer, grasping him as a sort of property. "M. le Baron had best keep up the beck. Out on the moor there he may fly the hawk, and that will best divert suspicion."

"Farewell, then," said the Baron, wringing the minister's hand, and adding, almost to himself, "Alas! I am weary of these shifts!" and weary indeed he seemed, for as the ground became so steep that the beck danced noisily down its channel, he could not keep up the needful speed, but paused, gasping for breath, with his hand on his side. Béranger was off his pony in an instant, assuring Follet that it ought to be proud to be ridden by his father, and exhaling his own exultant feelings in caresses to the animal as it gallantly breasted the hill. The little boy had never been so commended before! He loved his father exceedingly; but the Baron, while ever just towards him, was grave and strict to a degree that the ideas even of the sixteenth century regarded as severe. Little Eustacie with her lovely face, her irrepressible saucy grace and audacious coaxing, was the only creature to whom he ever showed much indulgence and tender-

ness, and even that seemed almost against his will and conscience. His son was always under rule, often blamed, and scarcely ever praised; but it was a hardy vigorous nature, and respectful love throve under the system that would have crushed or alienated a different disposition. It was not till the party had emerged from the wood upon a stubble field, where a covey of partridges flew up, and to Béranger's rapturous delight furnished a victim for Ysonde, that M. de Ribaumont dismounted from the pony, and walking towards home, called his son to his side, and asked him how he had learnt the intentions of the Count and the Chevalier. Béranger explained how Eustacie had come to warn him, and also told what she had said of Diane de Ribaumont, who had lately, by her father's request, spent a few weeks at the chateau with her cousins.

"My son," said the Baron, "it is hard to ask of babes caution and secrecy; but I must know from thee what thy cousin may have heard of our doings?"

"I cannot tell, father," replied Béranger; "we played more than we talked. Yet, Monsieur, you will not be angry with Eustacie if I tell you what she said to me to-day?"

"Assuredly not, my son."

"She said that her father would take her away if he knew what M. le Baron read, and what he sung."

"Thou hast done well to tell me, my son. Thinkest thou that this comes from Diane, or from one of the servants?"

"Oh, from Diane, my father; none of the servants would dare to say such a thing."

"It is as I suspected then," said the Baron. "That child was sent amongst us as a spy. Tell me Béranger, had she any knowledge of our intended journey to England?"

"To England! But no, father, I did not even know it was intended. To England—to that Walwyn which my mother takes such pains to make us speak rightly. Are we, then, going?"

"Listen, my son. Thou hast to-day proved thyself worthy of trust, and thou shalt hear. My son, ere yet I knew the truth I was a reckless disobedient youth, and I bore thy mother from her parents in England without their consent. Since, by Heaven's grace, I have come to a better mind, we have asked and obtained their forgiveness, and it has long been their desire to see again their daughter and her son. Moreover, since the accession of the present Queen, it has been a land where the light is free to shine forth; and though I verily believe what Maître Gardon says, that persecution is a blessed means of grace, yet it is grievous to expose one's dearest thereto when they are in no state to count the cost. Therefore would I thither convey you all, and there amid thy mother's family would we openly abjure the errors in which we have been nurtured. I have already sent to Paris to obtain from the Queen-mother the necessary permission to take my family to visit thy grandfather, and it must now be our endeavor to start immediately on the receipt of the reply, before the Chevalier's information can lead to any hindrance or detention of Eustacie."

"Then Eustacie will go with us, Monsieur?"

"Certainly. Nothing is more important than that her faith should be the same as yours! But discretion, my son: not a word to the little one."

"And Landry, father? I had rather Landry went than Eustacie. And Follet, dear father, pray take him."

After M. de Ribaumont's grave confidence to his son and heir, he was a little scandalized at the comparative value that the boy's voice indicated for wife;

foster-brother, and pony, and therefore received it in perfect silence, which silence continued until they reached the chateau, where the lady met them at the door with a burst of exclamations.

"Ah, there you are, safe, my dear Baron. I have been in despair. Here were the Count and his brother come to call on you to join them in dispersing a meeting of those poor Huguenots, and they would not permit me to send out to call you in! I verily think they suspected that you were aware of it."

M. de Ribaumont made no answer, but sat wearily down and asked for his little Eustacie.

"Little vixen!" exclaimed the Baroness, "she is gone; her father took her away with him." And as her husband looked extremely displeased, she added that Eustacie had been meddling with her jewel cabinet and had been put in penitence. Her first impulse on seeing her father had been to cling to him and pour out her complaints, whereupon he had declared that he should take her away with him at once, and had in effect caused her pony to be saddled, and he had ridden away with her to his old tower, leaving his brother, the Chevalier, to conduct the attack on the Huguenot conventicle.

"He had no power or right to remove her," said the Baron. "How could you let him do so in my absence? He had made over her wardship to me, and has no right to resume it!"

"Well, perhaps I might have insisted on his waiting till your return; but, you see, the children have never done anything but quarrel and fight, and always by Eustacie's fault; and if ever they are to endure each other, it must be by being separated now."

"Madame," said the Baron gravely, "you have done your utmost to ruin your son's chances of happiness."

That same evening arrived the King's passport per-

mitting the Baron de Ribaumont and his family to pay a visit to his wife's friends in England. The next morning the Baron was summoned to speak to one of his farmers, a Huguenot, who had come to inform him that, through the network of intelligence kept up by the members of the persecuted faith, it had become known that the Chevalier de Ribaumont had set off for court that night, and there was little doubt that his interference would lead to an immediate revocation of the sanction to the journey, if to no severer measures. At best, the Baron knew that if his own absence were permitted, it would be only on condition of leaving his son in the custody of either the Queen-mother or the Count. It had become impossible to reclaim Eustacie. Her father would at once have pleaded that she was being bred up in Huguenot errors. All that could be done was to hasten the departure ere the royal mandate could arrive. A little Norman sailing vessel was moored two evenings after in a lonely creek on the coast, and into it stepped M. de Ribaumont, with his Bible, Marot's Psalter, and Calvin's works, Béranger still tenderly kissing a lock of Follet's mane, and Madame mourning for the pearls, which her husband deemed too sacred an heirloom to carry away to a foreign land. Poor little Eustacie, with her cousin Diane, was, in the convent of Bellaise in Anjou. If any one lamented her absence, it was her father-in-law.

CHAPTER III

THE FAMILY COUNCIL

"He counsels a divorce."

SHAKSPEARE, *King Henry VIII.*

IN the spring of the year 1572, a family council was assembled in Hurst Walwyn Hall. The scene was a wainscoted oriel chamber closed off by a screen from the great hall, and fitted on two sides by presses of books, surmounted the one by a terrestrial, the other by a celestial globe, the first "with the addition of the Indies" in very eccentric geography, the second with enormous stars studding highly grotesque figures, regarded with great awe by most beholders.

A solid oaken table stood in the midst, laden with books and papers, and in a corner, near the open hearth, a carved desk, bearing on one slope the largest copy of the "Bishops' Bible;" on the other, one of the Prayer-book. The ornaments of the oaken mantel-piece culminated in a shield bearing a cross *boutonnée*, i.e. with trefoil terminations. It was supported between a merman with a whelk shell and a mermaid with a comb, and another like Siren curled her tail on the top of the gaping baronial helmet above the shield, while two more upheld the main weight of the chimney-piece on either side of the glowing wood fire.

In the seat of honour was an old gentleman, white-haired, and feeble of limb, but with noble features and a keen, acute eye. This was Sir William, Baron of Hurst Walwyn, a valiant knight at Guingate and

Boulogne, a statesman of whom Wolsey had been jealous, and a ripe scholar who had shared the friendship of More and Erasmus. The lady who sat opposite to him was several years younger, still upright, brisk and active, though her hair was milk-white; but her eyes were of undimmed azure, and her complexion still retained a beauteous pink and white. She was highly educated, and had been the friend of Margaret Roper and her sisters, often sharing their walks in the bright Chelsea garden. Indeed, the musk-rose in her own favourite nook at Hurst Walwyn was cherished as the gift of Sir Thomas himself.

Near her sat her sister, Cecily St. John, a professed nun at Romsey till her twenty-eighth year, when, in the dispersion of convents, her sister's home had received her. There had she continued, never exposed to tests of opinion, but pursuing her quiet course according to her Benedictine rule, faithfully keeping her vows, and following the guidance of the chaplain, a college friend of Bishop Ridley, and rejoicing in the use of the vernacular prayers and Scriptures. When Queen Mary had sent for her to consider of the revival of convents, her views had been found to have so far diverged from those of the Queen that Lord Walwyn was thankful to have her safe at home again; and yet she fancied herself firm to old Romsey doctrine. She was not learned, like Lady Walwyn, but her knowledge in all needlework and confectionery was consummate, so that half the ladies in Dorset and Wilts longed to send their daughters to be educated at Hurst Walwyn. Her small figure and soft cheeks had the gentle contour of a dove's form, nor had she lost the conventual serenity of expression; indeed it was curious that, let Lady Walwyn array her as she would, whatever she wore bore a nunlike air. Her silken farthingales hung like serge robes, her ruffs looked like mufflers, her

coifs like hoods, even necklaces seemed rosaries, and her scrupulous neatness enhanced the pure unearthly air of all belonging to her.

Eager and lively, fair and handsome, sat the Baronne de Ribaumont, or rather, since the higher title had been laid aside, Dame Annora Thistlewood. The health of M. de Ribaumont had been shattered at St. Quentin, and an inclement night of crossing the Channel had brought on an attack on the lungs, from which he only rallied enough to amaze his English friends at finding the gay dissipated young Frenchman they remembered, infinitely more strict and rigid than themselves. He was never able to leave the house again after his first arrival at Hurst Walwyn, and sank under the cold winds of the next spring, rejoicing to leave his wife and son, not indeed among such strict Puritans as he preferred, but at least where the pure faith could be openly avowed without danger.

Sir Marmaduke Thistlewood, the husband to whom Annora Walwyn had been destined before M. de Ribaumont had crossed her path, was about the same time left a widower with one son and daughter, and as soon as a suitable interval had passed, she became a far happier wife than she had been in either the Baron's gay or grave days. Her son had continued under the roof of his grandfather, to whose charge his father had especially committed him, and thus had been scarcely separated from his mother, since Combe Manor was not above three miles across the downs from Hurst Walwyn, and there was almost daily intercourse between the families. Lucy Thistlewood had been brought to Hurst Walwyn to be something between a maid of honour and a pupil to the ladies there, and her brother Philip, so soon as he was old enough, daily rode thither to share with Béranger the instructions of the chaplain, Mr. Adderley, who on

the present occasion formed one of the conclave, sitting a little apart as not quite familiar, though highly esteemed.

With an elbow on the table, and one hand toying with his long riding-whip, sat, booted and spurred, the jovial figure of Sir Marmaduke, who called out, in his hearty voice, "A good riddance of an outlandish Papist, say I! Read the letter, Berenger lad. No, no, no! English it! I know nothing of your mincing French! 'Tis the worst fault I know in you, boy, to be half a Frenchman, and have a French name"—a fault that good Sir Marmaduke did his best to remedy by always terming his step-son Berenger or Berry Ribmount, and we will so far follow his example as henceforth to give the youth the English form of his Christian name. He was by this time a tall lad of eighteen, with straight features, honest deep blue eyes, very fair hair cut short and brushed up to a crest upon the middle of his head, a complexion of red and white that all the air of the downs and the sea failed to embrown, and that peculiar openness and candour of expression which seems so much an English birth-right, that the only trace of his French origin was, that he betrayed no unbecoming awkwardness in the somewhat embarrassing position in which he was placed, literally standing, according to the respectful discipline of the time, as the subject of discussion before the circle of his elders. His colour was, indeed, deepened, but his attitude was easy and graceful, and he used no stiff rigidity nor restless movements to mask his anxiety. At Sir Marmaduke's desire, he could not but redden a good deal more, but with a clear, unhesitating voice, he translated the letter that he had received from the Chevalier de Ribaumont, who, by the Count's death, had become Eustacie's guardian. It was a request in the name of Eustacie

and her deceased father, that Monsieur le Baron de Ribault—who, it was understood, had embraced the English heresy—would concur with his spouse in demanding from his Holiness the Pope a decree annulling the childish marriage, which could easily be declared void, both on account of the consanguinity of the parties and the discrepancy of their faith; and which would leave each of them free to marry again.

“Nothing can be better,” exclaimed his mother. “How I have longed to free him from that little shrew, whose tricks were the plague of my life! Now there is nothing between him and a worthy match!”

“We can make an Englishman of him now to the backbone,” added Sir Marmaduke, “and it is well that it should be the lady herself who wants first to be off with it, so that none can say he has played her a scurvy trick.”

“What say you, Berenger?” said Lord Walwyn. “Listen to me, fair nephew. You know that all my remnant of hope is fixed upon you, and that I have looked to setting you in the room of a son of my own; and I think that under our good Queen you will find it easier to lead a quiet God-fearing life than in your father’s vexed country, where the Reformed religion lies under persecution. Natheless, being a born liegeman of the King of France, and heir to estates in his kingdom, meseemeth that before you are come to years of discretion it were well that you should visit them, and become better able to judge for yourself how to deal in this matter when you shall have attained full age, and may be able to dispose of them by sale, thus freeing yourself from allegiance to a foreign prince. And at the same time you can take measures, in concert with this young lady, for loosing the wedlock so unhappily contracted.”

"O sir, sir!" cried Lady Thistlewood, "send him not to France to be burnt by the Papists!"

"Peace, daughter," returned her mother. "Know you not that there is friendship between the court party and the Huguenots, and that the peace is to be sealed by the marriage of the King's sister with the King of Navarre? This is the most suitable time at which he could go."

"Then, madam," proceeded the lady, "he will be running about to all the preachings on every bleak moor and wet morass he can find, catching his death with rheums, like his poor father."

There was a general smile, and Sir Marmaduke laughed outright.

"Nay, dame," he said, "have you marked such a greed of sermons in our Berry that you should fear his so untowardly running after them?"

"Tilly-vally, Sir Duke," quoth Dame Annora, with a flirt of her fan, learnt at the French court. "Men will run after a preacher in a marshy bog out of pure frowardness, when they will nod at a godly homily on a well-stuffed bench between four walls."

"I shall commit that matter to Mr. Adderley, who is good enough to accompany him," said Lord Walwyn, "and by whose counsel I trust that he will steer the middle course between the Pope and Calvin."

Mr. Adderley bowed in answer, saying he hoped that he should be enabled to keep his pupil's mind clear between the allurements of Popery and the errors of the Reformed; but meanwhile Lady Thistlewood's mind had taken a leap, with the result that she exclaimed—

"And, son, whatever you do, bring home the chaplet of pearls! I know they have set their minds upon it. They wanted me to deck Eustacie with it on that unlucky bridal-day, but I would not hear of trusting

her with it, and now will it rarely become our Lucy on your real wedding-day."

"You travel swiftly, daughter," said Lord Walwyn. "Nor have we yet heard the thoughts of one who ever thinks wisely. Sister," he added, turning to Cecily St. John, "hold not you with us in this matter?"

"I scarce comprehend it, my Lord," was the gentle reply. "I knew not that it was possible to dissolve the tie of wedlock."

"The Pope's decree will suffice," said Lord Walwyn.

"Yet, sir," still said the ex-nun, "methought you had shown me that the Holy Father exceeded his power in the annulling of vows."

"Using mine own lessons against me, sweet sister?" said Lord Walwyn, smiling; "yet, remember, the contract was rashly made between two ignorant babes; and, bred up as they have severally been, it were surely best for them to be set free from vows made without their true will or knowledge."

"And yet," said Cecily, perplexed, "when I saw my niece here wedded to Sir Marmaduke, was it not with the words, 'What God hath joined let no man put asunder?'"

"Good lack! aunt," cried Lady Thistlewood, "you would not have that poor lad wedded to a pert, saucy, ill-tempered little moppet, bred up at that den of iniquity, Queen Catherine's court, where my poor Baron never trusted me after he fell in with the religion, and had heard of King Antony's calling me the Swan of England."

At that moment there was a loud shriek, half-laugh, half-fright, coming through the window, and Lady Thistlewood, starting up, exclaimed, "The child will be drowned! Box their ears, Berenger, and bring them in directly."

Berenger, at her bidding, hurried out of the room.

Coming from the companionship of Eustacie to that of gentle Lucy had been to Berenger a change from perpetual warfare to perfect supremacy, and his preference to his little sister, as he had been taught to call her from the first, had been loudly expressed. Brother and sister they had ever since considered themselves, and only within the last few months had possibilities been discussed among the elders of the family, which oozing out in some mysterious manner, had become felt rather than known among the young people, yet without altering the habitual terms that existed between them. Both were so young that love was the merest, vaguest dream to them; and Lucy, in her quiet faith that Berenger was the most beautiful, excellent, and accomplished cavalier the earth could afford, was little troubled about her own future share in him. She seemed to be promoted to belong to him just as she had grown up to curl her hair and wear ruffs and farthingales. And to Berenger Lucy was a very pleasant feature in that English home, where he had been far happier than in the uncertainties of Château Leurre, between his naughty playfellow, his capricious mother, and morose father. If in England his lot was to be cast, Lucy was acquiesced in willingly as a portion of that lot.

CHAPTER IV

TITHONUS

"A youth came riding towards a palace gate,
And from the palace came a child of sin
And took him by the curls and led him in!
Where sat a company with heated eyes."

TENNYSON, *A Vision of Sin*.

IT was in the month of June that Berenger de Ribau-mont first came in sight of Paris. His grandfather had himself begun by taking him to London and presenting him to Queen Elizabeth, from whom the lad's good mien procured him a most favourable reception. She willingly promised that on which Lord Walwyn's heart was set, namely, that his title and rank should be continued to his grandson; and an ample store of letters of recommendation to Sir Francis Walsingham, the Ambassador, and all others who could be of service in the French court, were to do their utmost to provide him with a favourable reception there.

Then, with Mr. Adderley and four or five servants, he had crossed the Channel, and had gone first to Château Leurre, where he was rapturously welcomed by the old steward Osbert. The old man had trained up his son Landry, Berenger's foster-brother, to become his valet, and had him taught all the arts of hair-dressing and surgery that were part of the profession of a gentleman's body-servant; and the youth, a smart, acute young Norman, became a valuable addition to the suite, the guidance of which, through a foreign country, their young master did not find very easy.

Mr. Adderley thought he knew French very well, through books, but the language he spoke was not available, and he soon fell into a state of bewilderment rather hard on his pupil, who, though a very good boy, and crammed very full of learning, was still nothing more than a lad of eighteen in all matters of prudence and discretion.

On the Sunday Berenger was at Leurre, he went, as a part of his old home-habits, to mass at the old round-arched church, where he and Eustacie had played each other so many teasing tricks at his mother's feet, and had received so many admonitory nips, and strokes of her fan. All he saw there was not congenial to him, but he liked it vastly better than the Huguenot meeting, and was not prepared to understand or enter into Mr. Adderley's vexation; when the tutor assured him that the reverent gestures that came naturally to him were regarded by the Protestants as idolatry, and that he would be viewed as a recreant from his faith. All Mr. Adderley hoped was that no one would hear of it: and in this he felt himself disappointed, when, in the midst of his lecture, there walked into the room a little, withered, brown, dark-eyed man, in a gorgeous dress of green and gold, who doffing a hat with an umbrageous plume, precipitated himself, as far as he could reach, towards Berenger's neck, calling him fair cousin and dear baron. The lad stood, taken by surprise for a moment, thinking that Tithonus must have looked just like this, and skipped like this, just as he became a grasshopper; then he recollected that this must be the Chevalier de Ribault, and tried to make up for his want of cordiality. The old man had, it appeared, come out of Picardy, where he lived on *soupe maigre* in a corner of the ancestral castle, while his son and daughter were at court, the one in Monsieur's suite, the other in that of

the Queen-mother. He had come purely to meet his dear young cousin, and render him all the assistance in his power, conduct him to Paris, and give him introductions.

Berenger, who had begun to find six Englishmen a troublesome charge in France, was rather relieved at not being the only French scholar of the party, and the Chevalier also hinted to him that he spoke with a dreadful Norman accent that would never be tolerated at court, even if it were understood by the way. Moreover, the Chevalier studied him all over, and talked of Paris tailors and posture-masters, and, though the pink of politeness, made it evident that there was immensely too much of him. "It might be the custom in England to be so tall; here no one was of anything like such a height, but the Duke of Guise. He, in his position, with his air, could carry it off, but we must adapt ourselves as best we can."

And his shrug and look of concern made Berenger for a moment almost ashamed of that superfluous height of which they were all so proud at home. Then he recollected himself, and asked, "And why should not I be tall as well as M. de Guise?"

"We shall see, fair cousin," he answered, with an odd satirical bow; "we are as Heaven made us. All lies in the management, and if you had the advantages of training, *perhaps* you could turn your height into a grace."

"Am I such a great lubber?" wondered Berenger; "they did not think so at home. No: nor did the Queen. She said I was a proper stripling! Well, it matters the less, as I shall not stay long to need their favour; and I'll show them there is some use in my inches in the tilt-yard. But if they think me such a lout, what would they say to honest Philip?"

The Chevalier seemed willing to take on him the

whole management of his "fair cousin." He inquired into the amount of the rents and dues which old Osbert had collected and held ready to meet the young Baron's exigencies; and which would, it seemed, be all needed to make his dress any way presentable at court. The pearls, too, were inquired for, and handed over by Osbert to his young Lord's keeping, with the significant intimation that they had been demanded when the young Madame la Baronne went to court; but that he had buried them in the orchard, and made answer that they were not in the château. The contract of marriage, which Berenger could just remember signing, and seeing signed by his father, the King, and the Count, was not forthcoming; and the Chevalier explained that it was in the hands of a notary at Paris. For this Berenger was not sorry. His grandfather had desired him to master the contents, and he thought he had thus escaped a very dry and useless study.

He did not exactly dislike the old Chevalier de Ribau mont. The system on which he had been brought up had not been indulgent, so that compliments and admiration were an agreeable surprise to him; and rebuffs and rebukes from his elders had been so common, that hints, in the delicate dressing of the old knight, came on him almost like gracious civilities. There was no love lost between the Chevalier and the chaplain, that was plain; but how could there be between an ancient French courtier and a sober English divine? However, to Mr. Adderley's great relief, no attempts were made on Berenger's faith, his kinsman even was disposed to promote his attendance at such Calvinist places of worship as they passed on the road, and treated him in all things as a mere guest, to be patronised indeed, but as much an alien as if he had been born in England. And yet there was a certain deference to him as head of the family, and a friendli-

ness of manner that made the boy feel him a real relation, and all through the journey it came naturally that he should be the entire manager, and Berenger the paymaster on a liberal scale.

Thus had the travelers reached the neighbourhood of Paris, when a jingling of chains and a trampling of horses announced the advance of riders, and several gentlemen with a troop of servants came in sight.

All were gaily dressed, with feathered hats, and short Spanish cloaks jauntily disposed over one shoulder; and their horses were trapped with bright silvered ornaments. As they advanced, the Chevalier exclaimed: "Ah! it is my son! I knew he would come to meet me." And, simultaneously, father and son leapt from their horses, and rushed into each other's arms. Berenger felt it only courteous to dismount and exchange embraces with his cousin, but with a certain sense of repulsion at the cloud of perfume that seemed to surround the younger Chevalier de Ribau-mont; the ear-rings in his ears; the general air of delicate research about his riding-dress, and the elaborate attention paid to a small, dark, sallow face and figure, in which the only tolerable feature was an intensely black and piercing pair of eyes.

"Cousin, I am enchanted to welcome you."

"Cousin, I thank you."

"Allow me to present you." And Berenger bowed low in succession several times in reply to salutations, as his cousin Narcisse named M. d'O, M. de la Valette, M. de Pibrac, M. l'Abbé de Méricour, who had done him the honour to accompany him in coming out to meet his father and M. le Baron. Then the two cousins remounted, something was said to the Chevalier of the devoirs of the demoiselles, and they rode on together bandying news and repartee so fast, that Berenger felt that his ears had become too much ac-

customed to the more deliberate English speech to enter at once into what caused so much excitement, gesture, and wit. The royal marriage seemed doubtful—the Pope refused his sanction; nay, but means would be found—the King would not be impeded by the Pope; Spanish influence—nay, the King had thrown himself at the head of the Reformed—he was bewitched with the grim old Coligny—if order were not soon taken, the Louvre itself would become a temple.

Then one of the party turned suddenly and said, "But I forget, Monsieur is a Huguenot?"

"I am a Protestant of the English Church," said Berenger, rather stiffly, in the formula of his day.

"Well, you have come at the right moment. 'Tis all for the sermon now. If the little Abbé there wishes to sail with a fair wind, he should throw away his breviary and study his Calvin."

Berenger's attention was thus attracted to the Abbé de Méricour, a young man of about twenty, whose dress was darker than that of the rest, and his hat of a clerical cut, though in other respects he was equipped with the same point-device elegance.

"Calvin would never give him the rich abbey of Selicy," said another; "the breviary is the safer speculation."

"Ah! M. de Ribaumont can tell you that abbeys are no such securities in these days. Let yonder Admiral get the upper hand, and we shall see Méricour, the happy cadet of eight brothers and sisters, turned adrift from their convents. What a fatherly spectacle M. le Marquis will present!"

Here the Chevalier beckoned to Berenger, who, riding forward, learnt that Narcisse had engaged lodgings for him and his suite at one of the great inns, and Berenger returned his thanks, and a proposal to the

Chevalier to become his guest. They were by this time entering the city, where the extreme narrowness and dirt of the streets contrasted with the grandeur of the palatial courts that could be partly seen through their archways. At the hostel they rode under such an arch, and found themselves in a paved yard that would have been grand had it been clean. Privacy had scarcely been invented, and the party were not at all surprised to find that the apartment prepared for them was to serve both day and night for Berenger, the Chevalier, and Mr. Adderley, besides having a truckle-bed on the floor for Osbert. Meals were taken in public, and it was now one o'clock—just dinner time; so after a hasty toilette the three gentlemen descended, the rest of the party having ridden off to their quarters, either as attendants of Monsieur or to their families. It was a sumptuous meal, at which a great number of gentlemen were present, coming in from rooms hired over shops—all, as it seemed, assembled at Paris for the marriage festivities; but Berenger began to gather that they were for the most part adherents of the Guise party, and far from friendly to the Huguenot interest. Some of them appeared hardly to tolerate Mr. Adderley's presence at the table; and Berenger, though his kinsman's patronage secured civil treatment, felt much out of his element, confused, unable to take part in the conversation, and sure that he was where those at home did not wish to see him.

No sooner was the dinner over than he rose and expressed his intention of delivering his letters of introduction in person to the English ambassador and to the Admiral de Coligny, whom, as his father's old friend and the hero of his boyhood, he was most anxious to see. The Chevalier demurred to this. Were it not better to take measures at once for making

himself presentable, and Narcisse had already supplied him with directions to the fashionable haircutter. It would be taken amiss if he went to the Admiral before going to present himself to the King.

"And I cannot see my cousins till I go to court?" asked Berenger.

"Most emphatically No. Have I not told you that the one is in the suite of the young Queen, the other in that of the Queen-mother? I will myself present you, if only you will give me the honour of your guidance."

"With all thanks, Monsieur," said Berenger; "my grandfather's desire was that I should lose no time in going to his friend Sir Francis Walsingham, and I had best submit myself to his judgment as to my appearance at court."

On this point Berenger was resolute, though the Chevalier recurred to the danger of any proceeding that might be unacceptable at court. Berenger, harassed and impatient, repeated that he did not care about the court, and wished merely to fulfil his purpose and return, at which his kinsman shook his head and shrugged his shoulders, and muttered to himself. "Ah, what does he know! He will regret it when too late; but I have done my best."

Berenger paid little attention to this, but calling Landry Osbert, and a couple of his men, he bade them take their swords and bucklers, and escort him in his walk through Paris. He set off with a sense of escape, but before he had made many steps, he was obliged to turn and warn Humfrey and Jack that they were not to walk swaggering along the streets, with hand on sword, as if every Frenchman they saw was the natural foe of their master.

Very tall were the houses, very close and extremely filthy the streets, very miserable the beggars; and yet

here and there was to be seen the open front of a most brilliant shop, and the thoroughfares were crowded with richly-dressed gallants. Even the wider streets gave little space for the career of the gay horsemen who rode along them, still less for the great, cumbrous, though gaily-decked coaches, in which ladies appeared glittering with jewels and fan in hand, with tiny white dogs on their knees.

The persons of whom Berenger inquired the way all uncapped most respectfully, and replied with much courtesy; but when the hotel of the English ambassador had been pointed out to him, he hardly believed it, so foul and squalid was the street, where a large nail-studded door occupied a wide archway. Here was a heavy iron knocker, to which Osbert applied himself. A little door was at once opened by a large, powerful John Bull of a porter, whose looks expanded into friendly welcome when he heard the English tongue of the visitor. Inside, the scene was very unlike that without.

The hotel was built round a paved court, adorned with statues and stone vases, with yews and cypresses in them, and a grand flight of steps led up to the grand centre of the house, around which were collected a number of attendants, wearing the Walsingham colours. Among these Berenger left his two Englishmen, well content to have fallen into an English colony. Landry followed him to an anteroom, while the groom of the chambers went forward to announce the visitor, Berenger waiting to know whether the Ambassador would be at liberty to see him.

Almost immediately the door was re-opened, and a keen-looking gentleman, about six-and-thirty years of age, rather short in stature, but nevertheless very dignified-looking, came forward with out-stretched hands—"Greet you well, my Lord de Ribaumont. We

expected your coming. Welcome, mine honored friend's grandson."

And as Berenger bent low in reverent greeting, Sir Francis took his hand and kissed his brow, saying, "Come in, my young friend; we are but sitting over our wine and comfits after dinner. Have you dined?"

Berenger explained that he had dined at the inn, where he had taken lodgings.

"Nay, but that must not be. My Lord Walwyn's grandson here, and not my guest! You do me wrong, sir, in not having ridden hither at once."

"Truly, my Lord, I ventured not. They sent me forth with quite a company—my tutor and six grooms."

474352
"Our chaplain will gladly welcome his reverend brother," said Sir Francis; "and as to the grooms, one of my fellows shall go and bring them and their horses up. What!" rather gravely, as Berenger still hesitated. "I have letters for you here, which methinks will make your grandfather's wish clear to you."

Berenger saw the Ambassador was displeased with his reluctance, and answered quickly, "In sooth, my Lord, I would esteem myself only too happy to be thus honoured, but in sooth—" he repeated himself, and faltered.

"In sooth, you expected more freedom than in my grave house," said Walsingham, displeased.

"Not so, my Lord: it would be all that I could desire; but I have done hastily. A kinsman of mine has come up to Paris with me, and I have made him my guest. I know not how to break with him—the Chevalier de Ribaumont."

"What, the young ruffler in Monsieur's suite?"

"No, my Lord; his father. He comes on my business. He is an old man, and can ill bear the cost, and I could scarce throw him over."

Berenger spoke with such earnest, bright, open simplicity, and look so boyish and confiding, that Sir Francis's heart was won, and he smiled as he said, "Right, lad, you are a considerate youth. It were not well to cast off your kinsman; but when you have read your letters, you may well plead your grandfather's desires, to say nothing of a hint from her Grace to have an eye to you. And for the rest, you can acquit yourself gracefully to the gentleman, by asking him to occupy the lodging that you had taken."

Berenger's face brightened up in a manner that spoke for his sincerity; and Sir Francis added, "And where be these lodgings?"

"At the Croix de Lorraine."

"Ha! your kinsman has taken you into a nest of Guisards. But come, let me present you to my wife and my other guests, then will I give you your letters, and you shall return and make your excuses to Monsieur le Chevalier."

Berenger seemed to himself to be on familiar ground again as his host thus assumed the direction of him and ushered him into a large dining-hall, where the table had been forsaken in favour of a lesser table placed in the ample window, round which sat assembled some six or eight persons, with fruit, wine, and conserves before them, a few little dogs at their feet or on their laps, and a lute lying on the knee of one of the young gentlemen. Sir Francis presented the young Lord de Ribauumont, their expected guest, to Lady Walsingham, from whom he received a cordial welcome, and her two little daughters, Frances and Elizabeth, and likewise to the gentleman with the lute, a youth about a year older than Berenger, and of very striking and prepossessing countenance, who was named as Mr. Sidney, the son of the Lord Deputy of Ireland. A couple of gentlemen who would in these times have

been termed *attachés*, a couple of lady attendants upon Lady Walsingham, and the chaplain made up the party, which on this day chanced only to include, besides the household, the young traveller, Sidney. Berenger was at once seated, and accepted a welcoming-cup of wine (*i.e.* a long slender glass with a beautifully twisted stem), responded to friendly inquiries about his relatives at home, and acknowledged the healths that were drunk in honour of their names; after which Lady Walsingham begged that Mr. Sidney would sing the madrigal he had before promised: afterwards a glee was sung by Sidney, one of the gentlemen, and Lady Walsingham; and it was discovered that M. de Ribau-mont had a trained ear, and the very voice that was wanting to the Italian song they were practising. And so sped a happy hour, till a booted and spurred messenger came in with letters for his Excellency, who being thus roused from his dreamy enjoyment of the music, carried young Ribaumont off with him to his cabinet, and there made over to him a packet, with good news from home, and orders that made it clear that he could do no other than accept the hospitality of the Embassy. Thus armed with authority, he returned to the Croix de Lorraine, where Mr. Adderley could not contain his joy at the change to quarters not only so much more congenial, but so much safer; and the Chevalier, after some polite demur, consented to remain in possession of the rooms. being in fact well satisfied with the arrangement.

"Let him steep himself up to the lips among the English," said Tithonus to his son. "Thus will he peaceably relinquish to you all that should have been yours from the first, and at court will only be looked on as an overgrown English page."

The change to the Ambassador's made Berenger happy at once. He was not French enough in breed-

ing, or even constitution, to feel the society of the Croix de Lorraine congenial; and, kind as the Chevalier showed himself, it was with a wonderful sense of relief that Berenger shook himself free from both his fawning and his patronising. There was a constant sense of not understanding the old gentleman's aims, whereas in Walsingham's house all was as clear, easy, and open as at home.

And though Berenger had been educated in the country, it had been in the same tone as that of his new friends. He was greatly approved by Sir Francis as a stripling of parts and modesty. Mr. Sidney made him a companion, and the young matron, Lady Walsingham, treated him as neither lout nor lubber. Yet he could not be at ease in his state between curiosity and repulsion towards the wife who was to be discarded by mutual consent. The sight of the scenes of his early childhood had stirred up warmer recollections of the pretty little playful torment whom through the vista of years assumed the air of a trisksy elf rather than the little vixen he used to think her. His curiosity had been further stimulated by the sight of his rival, Narcisse, whose effeminate ornaments, small stature, and seat on horseback filled Sir Marmaduke's pupil with inquisitive disdain as to the woman who could prefer anything so unmanly.

Sidney was to be presented at the after-dinner reception at the Louvre the next day, and Sir Francis proposed to take young Ribaumont with him. Berenger coloured, and spoke of his equipment, and Sidney good-naturedly offered to come and inspect. That young gentleman was one of the daintiest in apparel of his day; but he was amazed that the suit in which Berenger had paid his devoir to Queen Elizabeth should have been set aside—it was of pearl-grey velvet, slashed with rose-coloured satin, and in shape and

fashion point-device—unless, as the Ambassador said good-humouredly, “my young Lord Ribault wished to be one of Monsieur’s clique.” Thus arrayed, then, and with the chaplet of pearls bound round the small cap, with a heron-plume that sat jauntily on one side of his fair curled head, Berenger took his seat beside the hazel-eyed, brown-haired Sidney, in his white satin and crimson, and with the Ambassador and his attendants were rolled off in the great state-coach drawn by eight horses, which had no sinecure in dragging the ponderous machine through the unsavoury *débris* of the streets.

Royalty fed in public. The sumptuous banqueting-room contained a barrier, partitioning off a space where Charles IX. sat alone at his table, as a State spectacle. He was a sallow, unhealthy-looking youth, with large prominent dark eyes and a melancholy dreaminess of expression, as if the whole ceremony, not to say the world itself, were distasteful. Now and then, as though endeavouring to cast off the mood, he would call to some gentleman and exchange a rough jest, generally fortified with a tremendous oath, that startled Berenger’s innocent ears. He scarcely tasted what was put on his plate, but drank largely of sherbet, and seemed to be trying to linger through the space allotted for the ceremony.

Silence was observed, but not so absolute that Walsingham could not point out to his young companions the notabilities present. The lofty figure of Henri, Duke of Guise, towered high above all around him, and his grand features, proud lip, and stern eye claimed such natural superiority that Berenger for a moment felt a glow on his cheek as he remembered his challenge of his right to rival that splendid stature. And yet Guise was very little older than himself; but he walked, a prince of men, among a crowd of gentlemen,

attendants on him rather than on the King. The elegant but indolent-looking Duke de Montmorency had a much more attractive air, and seemed to hold a kind of neutral ground between Guise on the one hand, and the Reformed, who mustered at the other end of the apartment. Almost by intuition, Berenger knew the fine calm features of the grey-haired Admiral de Coligny before he heard him so addressed by the King's loud, rough voice. When the King rose from table the presentations took place, but as Charles heard the name of the Baron de Ribaumont, he exclaimed, "What, Monsieur, are you presented here by our good sister's representative?"

Walsingham answered for him, alluding to the negotiations for Queen Elizabeth's marriage with one of the French princes—"Sire, in the present happy conjuncture, it needs not be a less loyal Frenchman to have an inheritance in the lands of my royal mistress."

"What say you, Monsieur?" sharply demanded the King; "are you come here to renounce your country, religion—and love, as I have been told?"

"I hope, Sire, never to be unfaithful where I owe faith," said Berenger, heated, startled, and driven to extremity.

"Not ill-answered for the English giant," said Charles aside to an attendant: then turning eagerly to Sidney, whose transcendent accomplishments had already become renowned, Charles welcomed him to court, and began to discuss Ronsard's last sonnet, showing no small taste and knowledge of poetry. Greatly attracted by Sidney, the King detained the whole English party by an invitation to Walsingham to hear music in the Queen-mother's apartments; and Berenger, following in the wake of his friends, found himself in a spacious hall, with a raised gallery at one end for the musicians, the walls decorated with the

glorious paintings collected by François I., Greek and Roman statues clustered at the angles, and cabinets with gems and antiques disposed at intervals. Not that Berenger beheld much of this: he was absolutely dazzled with the brilliant assembly into which he was admitted. There moved the most beautiful women in France, in every lovely-coloured tint that dress could assume: their bosoms, arms, and hair sparkling with jewels; the gossamer ruffs surrounding their necks like fairy wings; their light laugh mingling with the music, as they sat, stood, or walked in graceful attitudes conversing with one another or with the cavaliers, whose brilliant velvet and jewels fitly mixed with their bright array. These were the sirens he had heard of, the "squadron of the Queen-mother," the dangerous beings against whom he was to steel himself. And which of them was the child he had played with, to whom his vows had been plighted? It was like some of the enchanting dreams of romance merely to look at these fair creatures, and he stood as if gazing into a magic-glass till Sir Francis Walsingham, looking round for him, said, "Come, then, my young friend, you must do your devoirs to the Queens. Sidney, I see, is as usual in his element; the King has seized upon him."

Catherine de Medicis was seated on a large velvet chair, conversing with the German ambassador. Never beautiful, she appeared to more advantage in her mature years than in her girlhood, and there was all the dignity of a lifetime of rule in her demeanour and gestures, the bearing of her head, the motion of her exquisite hands. Her eyes were like her son's, prominent, and gave the sense of seeing all round at once, and her smile was to the highest degree engaging. She received the young Baron de Ribaumont far more graciously than Charles had done, held out her hand

to be kissed, and observed "that the young gentleman was like Madame *sa mère* whom she well remembered as much admired. Was it true that she was married in England?"

Berenger bowed assent.

"Ah! you English make good spouses," she said, with a smile. "Ever satisfied with home! But, your Excellency," added she, turning to Walsingham, "what stones would best please my good sister for the setting of the jewel my son would send her with his portrait? He is all for emeralds, for the hue of hope; but I call it the colour of jealousy."

Walsingham made a sign that Berenger had better retreat from hearing the solemn coquetting carried on by the maiden Queen through her gravest ambassadors. He fell back, and remained watching the brilliant throng, trying in vain to discover the bright merry eyes and velvet cheek he remembered of old. Presently a kindly salutation interrupted him, and a gentleman who perceived him to be a stranger began to try to set him at ease, pointing out to him the handsome, foppishly-dressed Duke of Anjou, and his ugly, spiteful little brother of Alençon, then designated as Queen Elizabeth's future husband, who was saying something to a lady that made her colour and bite her lips. "Is that the younger Queen?" asked Berenger, as his eye fell on a sallow, dark-complexioned, sad-looking little creature in deep mourning, and with three or four such stately-looking, black-robed, Spanish-looking duennas round her as to prove her to be a person of high consequence.

"That? Oh no; that is Madame Catherine of Navarre, who has resided here ever since her mother's death, awaiting her brother, our royal bridegroom. See, here is the bride, Madame Marguerite, conversing with M. de Guise."

Berenger paid but little heed to Marguerite's showy but already rather coarse beauty, and still asked where was the young Queen Elizabeth of Austria. She was unwell, and not in presence. "Ah! then," he said, "her ladies will not be here."

"That is not certain. Are you wishing to see any one of them?"

"I would like to see——" He could not help colouring till his cheeks rivalled the colour of his sword-knot. "I want just to know if she is here. I know not if she be called Madame or Mademoiselle de Ribaumont."

"The fair Ribaumont! Assuredly; see, she is looking at you. Shall I present you?"

A pair of exceedingly brilliant dark eyes were fixed on Berenger with a sort of haughty curiosity and half-recognition. The face was handsome and brilliant, but he felt indignant at not perceiving a particle of a blush at encountering him, indeed rather a look of amusement at the deep glow which his fair complexion rendered so apparent. He would fain have escaped from so public an interview, but her eye was upon him, and there was no avoiding the meeting. As he moved nearer he saw what a beautiful person she was, her rich, primrose-coloured dress setting off her brunette complexion and her stately presence. She looked older than he had expected; but this was a hotbed where every one grew up early, and the expression and manner made him feel that an old intimacy was here renewed, and that they were no strangers.

"We need no introduction, cousin," she said, giving a hand to be saluted. "I knew you instantly. It is the old face of Château Leurre, only gone up so high and become so handsome."

"Cousins," thought he. "Well, it makes things easier! but what audacity to be so much at her ease, when Lucy would have sunk into the earth with

shame." His bow had saved him the necessity of answering in words, and the lady continued:

"And Madame *votre mère*. Is she well? She was very good to me."

Berenger did not think that kindness to Eustacie had been her chief perfection, but he answered that she was well and sent her commendations, which the young lady acknowledged by a magnificent curtsy. "And as beautiful as ever?" she asked.

"Quite as beautiful," he said, "only somewhat more *embonpoint*."

"Ah!" she said, smiling graciously, and raising her splendid eyes to his face, "I understand better what that famous beauty was now, and the fairness that caused her to be called the Swan."

It was so personal that the colour rushed again into his cheek. No one had ever so presumed to admire him; and with a degree gratified and surprised, and sensible more and more of the extreme beauty of the lady, there was a sort of alarm about him as if this were the very fascination he had been warned against, and as if she were casting a net about him, which, wife as she was, it would be impossible to him to break.

"Nay, Monsieur," she laughed, "is a word from one so near too much for your modesty? Is it possible that no one has yet told you of your good mien? Or do they not appreciate Greek noses and blue eyes in the land of fat Englishmen? How have you ever lived *en province*? Our princes are ready to hang themselves at the thought of being in such banishment, even at court—indeed, Monsieur has contrived to transfer the noose to M. d'Alençon. Have you been at court, cousin?"

"I have been presented to the Queen."

She then proceeded to ask questions about the chief personages with a rapid intelligence that surprised him

as well as alarmed him, for he felt more and more in the power of a very clever as well as beautiful woman, and the attraction she exercised made him long the more to escape; but she smiled and signed away several cavaliers who would have gained her attention. She spoke of Queen Mary of Scotland, then in the fifth year of her captivity, and asked if he did not feel bound to her service by having been once her partner. Did not he remember that dance?

"I have heard my mother speak of it far too often to forget it," said Berenger, glowing again for her who could speak of that occasion without a blush.

"You wish to gloss over your first inconstancy, sir," she said, archly; but he was spared from further reply by Philip Sidney's coming to tell him that the Ambassador was ready to return home. He took leave with an alacrity that redoubled his courtesy so much that he desired to be commended to his cousin Diane, whom he had not seen.

"To Diane?" said the lady, inquiringly.

"To Mademoiselle Diane de Ribauumont," he corrected himself, ashamed of his English rusticity. "I beg pardon if I spoke too familiarly of her."

"She should be flattered by M. le Baron's slightest recollection," said the lady, with an ironical tone that there was no time to analyse, and with a mutual gesture of courtesy he followed Sidney to where Sir Francis awaited them.

"Well, what think you of the French court?" asked Sidney, so soon as the young men were in private.

"I only know that you may bless your good fortune that you stand in no danger from a wife from thence."

"Ha!" cried Sidney, laughing, "you found your lawful owner. Why did you not present me?"

"I was ashamed of her bold visage."

"What!—was she the *beauteous* demoiselle I found

you gallanting," said Philip Sidney, a good deal entertained, "who was gazing at you with such visible admiration in her languishing black eyes?"

"The foul fiend seize their impudence!"

"Fie! for shame! thus to speak of your own wife," said the mischievous Sidney, "and the fairest——"

"Go to, Sidney. Were she fairer than Venus, with a kingdom to her dower, I would none of a woman without a blush."

"What, in converse with her wedded husband," said Sidney. "Were not that over-shamefastness?"

"Nay, now, Sidney, in good sooth give me your opinion. Should she set her fancy on me, even in this hour, am I bound in honour to hold by this accursed wedlock—lock, as it may well be called?"

"I know no remedy," said Sidney, gravely, "save the two enchanted founts of love and hate. They cannot be far away, since it was at the siege of Paris that Rinaldo and Orlando drank thereof."

Another question that Berenger would fain have asked Sidney, but could not for very shame and dread of mockery, was, whether he himself were so dangerously handsome as the lady had given him to understand. With a sense of shame, he caught up the little mirror in his casket, and could not but allow to himself that the features he there saw were symmetrical—the eyes azure, the complexion of a delicate fairness, such as he had not seen equalled, except in those splendid Lorraine princes; nor could he judge of the further effect of his open-faced frank simplicity and sweetness of expression—contemptible, perhaps, to the astute, but most winning to the world-weary. He shook his head at the fair reflection, smiled as he saw the colour rising at his own sensation of being a fool, and then threw it aside, vexed with himself for being unable not to feel attracted by the first woman who

had shown herself struck by his personal graces, and yet aware that this was the very thing he had been warned against, and determined to make all the resistance in his power to a creature whose very beauty and enchantment gave him a sense of discomfort.

CHAPTER V

THE CONVENT BIRD

"Young knight, whatever that dost armes professe,
And through long labours hunttest after fame,
Beware of fraud, beware of ficklenesse,
In choice and change of thy beloved dame."

SPENSER, *Faëry Queene*.

BERENGER'S mind was relieved, even while his vanity was mortified, when the Chevalier and his son came the next day to bring him the formal letter requesting the Pope's annulment of his marriage. After he had signed it, it was to be taken to Eustacie, and, so soon as he should attain his twenty-first year he was to dispose of Château Leurre, as well as of his claim to the ancestral castle in Picardy, to his cousin Narcisse, and thus become entirely free to transfer his allegiance to the Queen of England.

It was a very good thing—that he well knew; and he had a strong sense of virtue and obedience, as he formed with his pen the words in all their fulness, Henri Béranger Eustache, Baron de Ribaumont et Seigneur de Leurre. He could not help wondering whether the lady who looked at him so admiringly really preferred such a mean-looking little fop as Narcisse, whether she were afraid of his English home and breeding, or whether all this open coquetry were really the court manners of ladies towards gentlemen, and he had been an absolute simpleton to be flattered. Any way, she would have been a most undesirable wife, and he was well quit of her; but he did feel a certain

lurking desire that, since the bonds were cut and he was no longer in danger from her, he might see her again, carry home a mental inventory of the splendid beauties he had renounced, and decide what was the motive that actuated her in rejecting his own handsome self. Meantime, he proceeded to enjoy the amusements and advantage of his sojourn at Paris, of which by no means the least was the society of Philip Sidney, and the charm his brilliant genius imparted to every pursuit they shared. Books at the University, fencing and dancing from the best professors, Italian poetry, French sonnets, Latin epigrams; nothing came amiss to Sidney, the flower of English youth; and Berenger had taste, intelligence, and cultivation enough to enter into all in which Sidney led the way.

There came, shortly, an invitation to the ambassador's family and guests to a tilting-match and subsequent ball at the Louvre. In the first Berenger did his part with credit; to the second he went feeling full of that strange attraction of repulsion. He knew gentlemen enough in Coligny's suite for it to be likely that he might remain unperceived among them, and he knew this would be prudent, but he found himself unexpectedly near the ranks of ladies, and smile and gesture absolutely drew him towards his semi-spouse, so that he had no alternative but to lead her out to dance.

The stately measure was trod in silence as usual, but he felt the dark eyes studying him all the time. However, he could bear it better now that the deed was done, and she had voluntarily made him less to her than any gallant parading or mincing about the room.

"So you bear the pearls, sir?" she said, as the dance finished.

"The only heirloom I shall take with me," he said.

"Is a look at them too great a favour to ask from their jealous guardian?" she asked.

He smiled, half ashamed of his own annoyance at being obliged to place them in her hands. He was sure she would try to cajole him out of them, and by way of asserting his property in them he did not detach them from the band of his black velvet cap, but gave it with them into her hand. She looked at each one, and counted them wistfully.

"Seventeen!" she said; "and how beautiful! I never saw them so near before. They are so becoming to that fair cheek that I suppose no offer from my—my uncle, on our behalf, would induce you to part with them?"

An impulse of open-handed gallantry would have made him answer, "No offer from your uncle, but a simple request from you;" but he thought in time of the absurdity of returning without them, and merely answered, "I have no right to yield them, fair lady. They are the witness to my forefather's fame and prowess."

"Yes, sir, and to those of mine also," she replied. "And you would take them over to the enemy from whom that prowess extorted them?"

"The country which honoured and rewarded that prowess!" replied Berenger.

She looked at him with an interrogative glance of surprise at the readiness of his answer; then, with half a sigh, said, "There are your pearls, sir; I cannot establish our right, though I verily believe it was the cause of our last quarrel;" and she smiled archly.

"I believe it was," he said, gravely; but added, in the moment of relief at recovering the precious heirloom, "though it was Diane who inspired you to seize upon them."

"Ah! poor Diane! you sometimes recollect her then?"

If I remember right, you used to agree with her better than with your little spouse, cousin!"

"If I quarrelled with her less, I liked her less," answered Berenger—who, since the act of separation, had not been so guarded in his demeanour, and began to give way to his natural frankness.

"Indeed! Diane would be less gratified than I ought to be. And why, may I ask?"

"Diane was more caressing, but she had no truth."

"Truth! that was what *feu* M. le Baron ever talked of; what Huguenots weary one with."

"And the only thing worth seeking, the real pearl," said Berenger, "without which all else is worthless."

"Ah!" she said, "who would have thought that soft, youthful face could be so severe! You would never forgive a deceit?"

"Never," he said, with the crystal hardness of youth; "or rather I might forgive; I could never esteem."

"What a bare, rude world yours must be," she said, shivering. "And no weak ones in it! Only the strong can dare to be true."

"Truth is strength!" said Berenger. "For example: I see yonder a face without bodily strength, perhaps, but with perfect candour."

"Ah! some Huguenot girl of Madame Catherine's, no doubt—from the depths of Languedoc, and dressed like a fright."

"No, no; the young girl behind the pale, yellow-haired lady."

"*Comment*, Monsieur. Do you not yet know the young Queen?"

"But who is the young demoiselle!—she with the superb black eyes, and the ruby rose in her black hair?"

"Take care, sir, do you not know I have still a right to be jealous?" she said, blushing, bridling, and laughing.

But this pull on the cords made him the more resolved; he would not be turned from his purpose. "Who is she?" he repeated, "have I ever seen her before? I am sure I remember that innocent look of *espièglerie*."

"You may see it on any child's face fresh out of the convent; it does not last a month!" was the still displeased, rather jealous answer. "That little thing—I believe they call her Nid-de-Merle—she has only just been brought from her nunnery to wait on the young Queen. Ah! your gaze was perilous, it is bringing on you one of the jests of Madame Marguerite."

With laughter and gaiety, a troop of gentlemen descended on M. de Ribaumont, and told him that Madame Marguerite desired that he should be presented to her. The princess was standing by her pale sister-in-law, Elizabeth of Austria, who looked grave and annoyed at the mischievous mirth flashing in Marguerite's dark eyes.

"M. de Ribaumont," said the latter, her very neck heaving with suppressed fun, "I see I cannot do you a greater favour than by giving you Mademoiselle de Nid-de-Merle for your partner."

Berenger was covered with confusion to find that he had been guilty of such a fixed stare as to bring all this upon the poor girl. He feared that his vague sense of recognition had made his gaze more open than he knew, and he was really and deeply ashamed of this as his worst act of provincial ill-breeding.

Poor little convent maid, with crimson cheeks, flashing eyes, panting bosom, and a neck evidently aching with proud dignity and passion, she received his low bow with a sweeping curtsey, as lofty as her little person would permit.

His cheeks burnt like fire, and he would have found words to apologize, but she cut him short by saying,

hastily and low, "Not a word, Monsieur! Let us go through it at once. No one shall make game of us."

He hardly durst look at her again; but as he went through his own elaborate paces he knew that the little creature opposite was swimming, bending, turning, bounding with the fluttering fierceness of an angry little bird, and that the superb eyes were casting flashes on him that seemed to carry him back to days of early boyhood.

Once he caught a mortified, pleading, wistful glance that made him feel as if he had inflicted a cruel injury by his thoughtless gaze, and he resolved to plead the sense of recognition in excuse; but no sooner was the performance over than she prevented all conversation by saying, "Lead me back at once to the Queen, sir; she is about to retire." They were already so near that there was not time to say anything; he could only hold as lightly as possible the tiny fingers that he felt burning and quivering in his hand, and then, after bringing her to the side of the chair of state, he was forced to release her with the mere whisper of "Pardon, Mademoiselle;" and the request was not replied to, save by the additional stateliness of her curtsey.

It was already late, and the party was breaking up; but his head and heart were still in a whirl when he found himself seated in the ambassadorial coach, hearing Lady Walsingham's well-pleased rehearsal of all the compliments she had received on the distinguished appearance of both her young guests. Sidney, as the betrothed of her daughter, was property of her own; but she also exulted in the praises of the young Lord de Ribau mont, as proving the excellence of the masters whom she had recommended to remove the rustic clownishness of which he had been accused.

"Nay," said Sir Francis; "whoever called him too clownish for court spake with design."

The brief sentence added to Berenger's confused sense of being in a mist of false play. Could his kinsman be bent on keeping him from court? Could Narcisse be jealous of him? Mademoiselle de Ribau-mont was evidently inclined to seek him, and her cousin might easily think her lands safer in his absence. He would have been willing to hold aloof as much as his uncle and cousin could wish, save for an angry dislike to being duped and cajoled; and, moreover, a strong curiosity to hear and see more of that little passionate bird, fresh from the convent cage. Her gesture and her eyes irresistibly carried him back to old times, though whether to an angry blackbird in the yew-tree alleys at Leurre, or to the eager face that had warned him to save his father, he could not remember with any distinctness. At any rate, he was surprised to find himself thinking so little in comparison about the splendid beauty and winning manners of his discarded spouse, though he quite believed that, now her captive was beyond her grasp, she was disposed to catch at him again, and try to retain him, or, as his titillated vanity might whisper, his personal graces might make her regret the family resolution which she had obeyed.

CHAPTER VI

FOULLY COZENED

"I was the more deceived."—*Hamlet*.

THE unhappy Charles IX. had a disposition that in good hands might have achieved great nobleness; and though cruelly bound and trained to evil, was no sooner allowed to follow its natural bent than it reached out eagerly towards excellence. At this moment, it was his mother's policy to appear to leave the ascendancy to the Huguenot party, and he was therefore allowed to contract friendships which deceived the intended victims the more completely, because his admiration and attachment were spontaneous and sincere. Philip Sidney's varied accomplishments and pure lofty character greatly attracted the young King, who had leant on his arm conversing during great part of the ball, and the next morning sent a royal messenger to invite the two young gentlemen to a party at pall-mall in the Tuileries gardens.

Pall-mall was either croquet or its nearest relative, and was so much the fashion that games were given in order to keep up political influence, perhaps, because the freedom of a garden pastime among groves and bowers afforded opportunities for those seductive arts on which Queen Catherine placed much dependence. The formal gardens, with their squares of level turf and clipped alleys, afforded excellent scope both for players and spectators, and numerous games had been set on foot, from all of which, however, Berenger con-

trived to exclude himself, in his restless determination to find out the little Demoiselle de Nid-de-Merle, or, at least, to discover whether any intercourse in early youth accounted for his undefined sense of remembrance.

He interrogated the first disengaged person he could find, but it was only the young Abbé de Méricour, who had been newly brought up from Dauphiné by his elder brother to solicit a benefice, and who knew nobody. To him, ladies were only bright phantoms such as his books had taught him to regard like the temptations of St. Anthony, but whom he actually saw treated with as free admiration by the ecclesiastic as by the layman.

Suddenly a clamour of voices arose on the other side of the closely-clipped wall of limes by which the two youths were walking. There were the clear tones of a young maiden expostulating in indignant distress, and the bantering, indolent determination of a male annoyer.

"Hark!" exclaimed Berenger; "this must be seen to."

"Have a care," returned Méricour; "I have heard that a man needs look twice ere meddling."

Scarcely hearing, Berenger strode on as he had done at the last village wake, when he had rescued Cis of the Down from the impertinence of a Dorchester scrivener. It was a like case, he saw, when breaking through the arch of clipped limes he beheld the little Demoiselle de Nid-de-Merle, driven into a corner and standing at bay, with glowing cheeks, flashing eyes, and hands clasped over her breast, while a young man, dressed in the extreme of foppery, was assuring her that she was the only lady who had not granted him a token—that he could not allow such *pensionnaire* airs, and that now he had caught her he would have his

revenge, and win her rose-coloured breastknot. Another gentleman stood by, laughing, and keeping guard in the walk that led to the more frequented part of the gardens.

"Hold!" thundered Berenger.

The assailant had just mastered the poor girl's hand, but she took advantage of his surprise to wrench it away and gather herself up as for a spring, but the Abbé in dismay, the attendant in anger, cried out, "Stay—it is Monsieur."

"Monsieur; be he who he may," exclaimed Berenger, "no honest man can see a lady insulted."

"Are you mad? It is Monsieur the Duke of Anjou," said Méricour, pouncing on his arm.

"Shall we have him to the guardhouse?" added the attendant, coming up on the other side; but Henri de Valois waved them both back, and burst into a derisive laugh. "No, no; do you not see who it is? Monsieur the English Baron still holds the end of the halter. His sale is not yet made. Come away, D'O, he will soon have enough on his hands without us. Farewell, fair lady, another time you will be free of your jealous giant."

So saying, the Duke of Anjou strolled off, feigning indifference and contempt, and scarcely heeding that he had been traversed in one of the malicious adventures which he delighted to recount in public before the discomfited victim herself, often with shameful exaggeration.

The girl clasped her hands over her brow with a gesture of dismay, and cried, "Oh! if you had only not touched your sword."

"Let me have the honour of reconducting you, Mademoiselle," said Beranger, offering his hand; but after the first sigh of relief, a tempestuous access seized her. She seemed about to dash away his hand,

her bosom swelled with resentment, and with a voice striving for dignity, though choked with strangled tears, she exclaimed, "No, indeed! Had not M. le Baron forsaken me, I had never been thus treated!" and her eyes flashed through their moisture.

"Eustacie! You are Eustacie!"

"Whom would you have me to be otherwise? I have the honour to wish M. le Baron a good morning."

"Eustacie! Stay! Hear me! It concerns my honour. I see it is you—but whom have I seen? Who was she?" he cried, half wild with dismay and confusion. "Was it Diane?"

"You have seen and danced with Diane de Ribau-mont," answered Eustacie, still coldly; "but what of that? Let me go, Monsieur; you have cast me off already."

"I! when all this has been of your own seeking?"

"Mine?" cried Eustacie, panting with the struggle between her dignity and her passionate tears. "I meddled not. I heard that M. le Baron was gone to a strange land, and had written to break off old ties." Her face was in a flame, and her efforts for composure absolute pain.

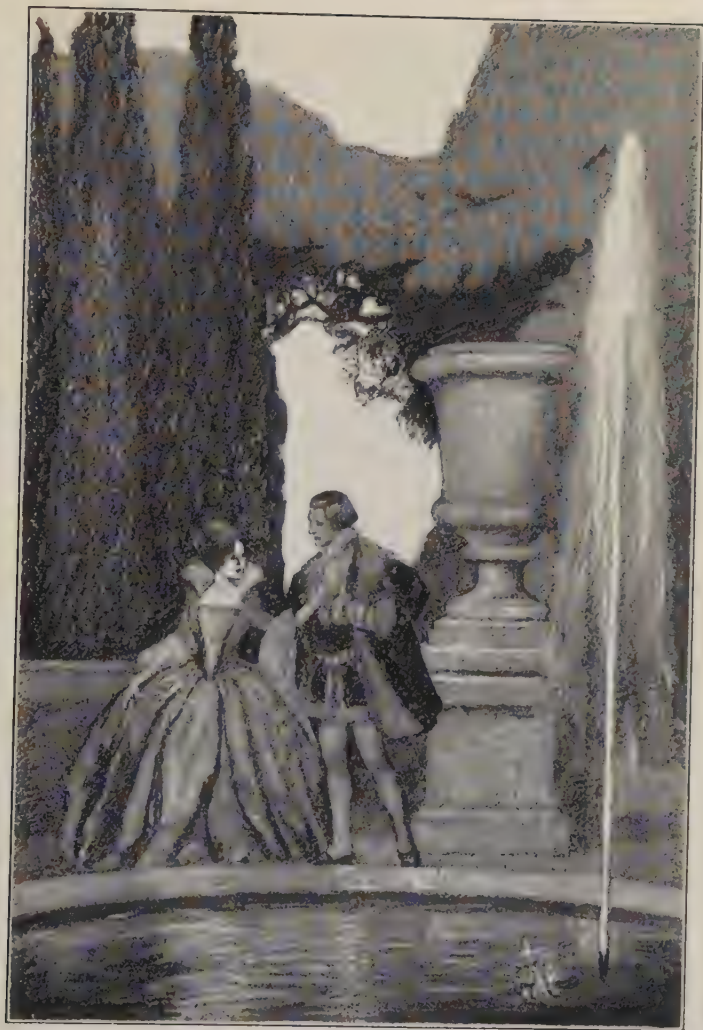
"I!" again exclaimed Berenger. "The first letter came from your uncle, declaring that it was your wish!" And as her face changed rapidly, "Then it was not true! He has not had your consent?"

"What! would I hold to one who despised me—who came here and never even asked to see this hated spouse!"

"I did! I entreated to see you. I would not sign the application till—Oh, there has been treachery! And have they made you too sign it?"

"When they showed me your name they were welcome to mine."

Berenger struck his forehead with wrath and per-



“‘NO BLAME FOR BEING WITH THY HUSBAND,’ HE
ANSWERED, CLASPING HER HAND”

plexity, then cried, joyfully, "It will not stand for a moment. So foul a cheat can be at once exposed. Eustacie, you know—you understand, that it was not you but Diane whom I saw and detested; and no wonder, when your cousin was acting such a cruel treason!"

"Oh no, Diane would never so treat me," cried Eustacie. "I see how it was! You did not know that my father was latterly called Marquis de Nid-de-Merle, and when they brought me here, they *would* call me after him: they said a maid of honour must be Demoiselle, and my uncle said there was only one way in which I could remain Madame de Ribaumont! And the name must have deceived you. Thou wast always a great dull boy," she added, with a sudden assumption of childish intimacy that annihilated the nine years since their parting.

"Had I seen thee, I had not mistaken for an instant. This little face stirred my heart; hers repelled me. And she deceived me wittingly, Eustacie, for I asked after her by name."

"Ah, she wished to spare my embarrassment. And then her brother must have dealt with her."

"I see," exclaimed Berenger, "I am to be palmed off thus that thou mayest be reserved for Narcisse. Tell me, Eustacie, wast thou willing?"

"I hate Narcisse!" she cried. "But oh, I am lingering too long. Monsieur will make some hateful tale! I never fell into his way before, my Queen and Madame la Comtesse are so careful. Only to-day, as I was attending her alone, the King came and gave her his arm, and I had to drop behind. I must find her; I shall be missed," she added, in sudden alarm. "Oh, what will they say?"

"No blame for being with thy husband," he answered, clasping her hand. "Thou art mine hence-

forth. I will soon cut our way out of the web thy treacherous kindred have woven. Meantime——”

“Hush! There are voices,” cried Eustacie in terror, and, guided by something he could not discern, she fled with the swiftness of a bird down the alley. Following, with the utmost speed that might not bear the appearance of pursuit, he found that on coming to the turn she had moderated her pace, and was more tranquilly advancing to a bevy of ladies, who sat perched on the stone steps like great butterflies sunning themselves, watching the game, and receiving the attentions of their cavaliers. He saw her absorbed into the group, and then began to prowling round it, in the alleys, in a tumult of amazement and indignation. He had been shamefully deceived and cheated, and justice he would have! He had been deprived of a thing of his own, and he would assert his right. He had been made to injure and disown the creature he was bound to protect, and he must console her and compensate to her, were it only to redeem his honour. He never even thought whether he loved her; he merely felt furious at the wrong he had suffered and been made to commit, and hotly bent on recovering what belonged to him. He might even have plunged down among the ladies and claimed her as his wife, if the young Abbé de Méricour, who was two years older than he, and far less of a boy for his years, had not joined him in his agitated walk. He then learnt that all the Court knew that the daughter of the late Marquis de Nid-de-Merle, Comte de Ribaumont, was called by his chief title, but that her marriage to himself had been forgotten by some and unknown to others, and thus that the first error between the cousins had not been wonderful in a stranger, since the Chevalier’s daughter had always been Mlle. de Ribaumont. The error once made, Berenger’s distaste to Diane had been so con-

venient that it had been carefully encouraged, and the desire to keep him at a distance from Court and throw him into the background was accounted for. The Abbé was almost as indignant as Berenger, and assured him both of his sympathy and his discretion.

"I see no need for discretion," said Berenger. "I shall claim my wife in the face of the sun."

"Take counsel first, I entreat," exclaimed Méricour. "The Ribaumonts have much influence with the Guise family, and now you have offended Monsieur."

"Ah! where are those traitorous kinsmen?" cried Berenger.

"Fortunately all are gone on an expedition with the Queen-mother. You will have time to think. I have heard my brother say no one ever prospered who offended the meanest follower of the house of Lorraine."

"I do not want prosperity, I only want my wife. I hope I shall never see Paris and its deceivers again."

"Ah! but is it true that you have applied to have the marriage annulled at Rome?"

"We were both shamefully deceived. That can be nothing."

"A decree of his Holiness: you a Huguenot; she an heiress. All is against you. My friend, be cautious," exclaimed the young ecclesiastic, alarmed by his passionate gestures. "To break forth now and be accused of brawling in the palace precincts would be fatal—fatal—most fatal!"

"I am as calm as possible," returned Berenger. "I mean to act most reasonably. I shall stand before the King and tell him openly how I have been tampered with, demanding my wife before the whole Court."

"Long before you could get so far the ushers would have dragged you away for brawling, or for maligning an honourable gentleman. You would have to

finish your speech in the Bastille, and it would be well if even your English friends could get you out alive."

"Why, what a place is this!" began Berenger; but again Méricour entreated him to curb himself; and his English education had taught him to credit the house of Guise with so much mysterious power and wickedness, that he allowed himself to be silenced, and promised to take no open measures till he had consulted the Ambassador.

He could not obtain another glimpse of Eustacie, and the hours passed tardily till the break up of the party. Charles could scarcely release Sidney from his side, and only let him go on condition that he should join the next day in an expedition to the hunting château of Montpipeau, to which the King seemed to look forward as a great holiday and breathing time.

When at length the two youths did return, Sir Francis Walsingham was completely surprised by the usually tractable, well-behaved stripling, whose praises he had been writing to his old friend, bursting in on him with the outcry, "Sir, sir, I entreat your counsel! I have been foully cozened."

"Of how much?" said Sir Francis, in a tone of reprobation.

"Of my wife. Of mine honour. Sir, your Excellency, I crave pardon, if I spoke too hotly," said Berenger, collecting himself; "but it is enough to drive a man to frenzy."

"Sit down, my Lord de Ribaumont. Take breath, and let me know what is this coil. What hath thus moved him, Mr. Sidney?"

"It is as he says, sir," replied Sidney, who had heard all as they returned; "he has been greatly wronged. The Chevalier de Ribaumont not only writ to propose the separation without the lady's knowledge, but im-

posed his own daughter on our friend as the wife he had not seen since infancy."

"There, sir," broke forth Berenger; "surely if I claim mine own in the face of day, no man can withhold her from me!"

"Hold!" said Sir Francis. "What means this passion, young sir? Methought you came hither convinced that both the religion and the habits in which the young lady had been bred up rendered your infantile contract most unsuitable. What hath fallen out to make this change in your mind?"

"That I was cheated, sir. The lady who palmed herself off on me as my wife was a mere impostor, the Chevalier's own daughter!"

"That may be; but what know you of this other lady? Has she been bred up in faith or manners such as your parents would have your wife?"

"She is my wife," reiterated Berenger. "My faith is plighted to her. That is enough for me."

Sir Francis made a gesture of despair. "He has seen her, I suppose," said he to Sidney.

"Yes truly, sir," answered Berenger; "and found that she had been as greatly deceived as myself."

"Then mutual consent is wanting," said the statesman, gravely musing.

"That is even as I say," began Berenger, but Walsingham held up his hand, and desired that he would make his full statement in the presence of his tutor.

Then sounding a little whistle, the ambassador despatched a page to request the attendance of Mr. Adderley, and recommended young Ribaultmont in the meantime to compose himself.

Used to being under authority as Berenger was, the somewhat severe tone did much to allay his excitement, and remind him that right and reason were so entirely

on his side, that he had only to be cool and rational to make them prevail. He was thus able to give a collected and coherent account of his discovery that the part of his wife had been assumed by her cousin Diane, and that the signature of both the young pair to the application to the Pope had been obtained on false pretences.

That he had, as Sidney said, been foully cozened, in both senses of the word, was as clear as daylight; but he was much angered and disappointed to find that neither the ambassador nor his tutor could see that Eustacie's worthiness was proved by the iniquity of her relations, or that any one of the weighty reasons for the expediency of dissolving the marriage was removed. The whole affair had been in such good train a little before, that Mr. Adderley was much distressed that it should thus have been crossed, and thought the new phase of affairs would be far from acceptable at Combe Walwyn.

"Whatever is just and honourable must be acceptable to my grandfather," said Berenger.

"Even so," said Walsingham; "but it were well to consider whether justice and honour require you to overthrow the purpose wherewith he sent you hither."

"Surely, sir, justice and honour require me to fulfil a contract to which the other party is constant," said Berenger, feeling very wise and prudent for calling that wistful, indignant creature the other party.

"That is also true," said the ambassador, "provided she be constant; but you own that she signed the requisition for the dissolution."

"She did so, but under the same deception as myself, and further mortified and aggrieved at my seeming faithlessness."

"So it may easily be represented," muttered Walsingham.

"How, sir?" cried Berenger, impetuously; "do you doubt her truth?"

"Heaven forefend," said Sir Francis, "that I should discuss any fair lady's sincerity! The question is how far you are bound. Have I understood you that you are veritably wedded, not by a mere contract of espousal?"

Berenger could produce no documents, for they had been left at Château Leurre, and on his father's death the Chevalier had claimed the custody of them; but he remembered enough of the ceremonial to prove that the wedding had been a veritable one, and that only the papal intervention could annul it.

Indeed an Englishman, going by English law, would own no power in the Pope, nor any one on earth, to sever the sacred tie of wedlock; but French courts of law would probably ignore the mode of application, and would certainly endeavour to separate between a Catholic and a heretic.

"I am English, sir, in heart and faith," said Berenger, earnestly. "Look upon me as such, and tell me, am I married or single at this moment?"

"Married assuredly. More's the pity," said Sir Francis.

"And no law of God or man divides us without our own consent." There was no denying that the mutual consent of the young pair at their present age was all that was wanting to complete the inviolability of their marriage contract.

Berenger was indeed only eighteen, and Eustacie more than a year younger, but there was nothing in their present age to invalidate their marriage, for persons of their rank were usually wedded quite as young or younger. Walsingham was only concerned at his old friend's disappointment, and at the danger of the young man running headlong into a connexion

probably no more suitable than that with Diane de Ribeaumont would have been. But it was not convenient to argue against the expediency of a man's loving his own wife; and when Berenger boldly declared he was not talking of love but of justice, it was only possible to insist that he should pause and see where true justice lay.

And thus the much perplexed ambassador broke up the conference with his hot and angry young guest.

"And Mistress Lucy——?" sighed Mr. Adderley, in rather an *inapropos* fashion it must be owned; but then he had been fretted beyond endurance by his pupil striding up and down his room, reviling Diane, and describing Eustacie, while he was trying to write these uncomfortable tidings to Lord Walwyn.

"Lucy! What makes you bring her up to me?" exclaimed Berenger. "Little Dolly would be as much to the purpose!"

"Only, sir, no resident at Hurst Walwyn could fail to know what has been planned and desired."

"Pshaw!" cried Berenger; "have you not heard that it was a mere figment, and that I could scarce have wedded Lucy safely, even had this matter gone as you wish. This is the luckiest chance that could have befallen her."

"That may be," said Mr. Adderley; "I wish she may think so—sweet young lady!"

"I tell you, Mr. Adderley, you should know better! Lucy has more sense. My aunt, whom she follows more than any other creature, ever silenced the very sport or semblance of love passages between us even as children, by calling them unseemly in one wedded as I am. Brother and sister we have ever been, and have loved as such—ay, and shall! I know of late some schemes have crossed my mother's mind——"

"Yea, and that of others."

“But they have not ruffled Lucy’s quiet nature—trust me! And for the rest? What doth she need of me in comparison of this poor child? She—like a bit of her own grey lavender in the shadiest nook of the walled garden, tranquil there—sure not to be taken there, save to company with fine linen in some trim scented coffer, whilst this fresh glowing rosebud has grown up pure and precious in the very midst of the foulest corruption Christendom can show, and if I snatch her not from it, I, the only living man who can, look you, in the very bloom of her innocence and sweetness, what is to be her fate? The very pity of a Christian, the honour of a gentleman, would urge me, even if it were not my most urgent duty!”

Mr. Adderley argued no more. When Berenger came to his duty in the matter he was invincible, and moreover all the more provoking, because he mentioned it with a sort of fiery sound of relish, and looked so very boyish all the time. Poor Mr. Adderley! feeling as if his trust were betrayed, loathing the very idea of a French Court lady, saw that his pupil had been allured into a headlong passion to his own misery, and that of all whose hopes were set on him, yet preached to by this stripling scholar about duties and sacred obligations! Well might he rue the day he ever set foot in Paris.

Then, to his further annoyance, came a royal messenger to invite the Baron de Ribaumont to join the expedition to Montpipeau. Of course he must go, and his tutor must be left behind, and who could tell into what mischief he might not be tempted!

Here, however, Sidney gave the poor chaplain some comfort. He believed that no ladies were to be of the party, and that the gentlemen were chiefly of the King’s new friends among the Huguenots, such as Coligny, his son-in-law Teligny, Rochefoucauld, and

the like, among whom the young gentleman could not fall into any very serious harm, and might very possibly be influenced against a Roman Catholic wife. At any rate, he would be out of the way, and unable to take any dangerous steps.

This same consideration so annoyed Berenger that he would have declined the invitation, if royal invitations could have been declined. And in the morning, before setting out, he dressed himself point de vice, and with Osbert behind him marched down to the Croix de Lorraine, to call upon the Chevalier de Ribaumont. He had a very fine speech at his tongue's end when he set out, but a good deal of it had evaporated when he reached the hotel, and perhaps he was not very sorry not to find the old gentleman within.

On his return, he indited a note to the Chevalier, explaining that he had now seen his wife, Madame la Baronne de Ribaumont, and had come to an understanding with her, by which he found that it was under a mistake that the application to the Pope had been signed, and that they should, therefore, follow it up with a protest, and act as if no such letter had been sent.

Berenger showed this letter to Walsingham, who, though much concerned, could not forbid his sending it. "Poor lad," he said to the tutor, "'tis an excellently writ billet for one so young. I would it were in a wiser cause. But he has fairly the bit between his teeth, and there is no checking him while he has this show of right on his side."

And poor Mr. Adderley could only beseech Mr. Sidney to take care of him.

CHAPTER VII

THE QUEEN'S PASTORAL

"Either very gravely gay,
Or very gaily grave."

W. M. PRAED.

MONTPIPEAU, though in the present day a suburb of Paris, was in the sixteenth century far enough from the city to form a sylvan retreat, where Charles IX. could snatch a short respite from the intrigues of his Court, under pretext of enjoying his favourite sport. Surrounded with his favoured associates of the Huguenot party, he seemed to breathe a purer atmosphere, and to yield himself up to enjoyment greater than perhaps his sad life had ever known.

He rode among his gentlemen, and the brilliant cavalcade passed through poplar-shaded roads, clattered through villages, and threaded their way through bits of forest still left for the royal chase. The people thronged out of their houses, and shouted not only "Vive le Roy," but "Vive l'Amiral," and more than once the cry was added, "Spanish war, or civil war!" The heart of France was, if not with the Reformed, at least against Spain and the Lorrainers, and Sidney perceived, from the conversation of the gentlemen round him, that the present expedition had been devised less for the sake of the sport, than to enable the King to take measures for emancipating himself from the thralldom of his mother, and engaging the country in a war against Philip II. Sidney listened, but Berenger chafed, feeling only that he was being further carried

out of reach of his explanation with his kindred. And thus they arrived at Montpipeau, a tower, tall and narrow, like all French designs, but expanded on the ground floor by wooden buildings capable of containing the numerous train of a royal hunter, and surrounded by an extent of waste land, without fine trees, though with covert for deer, boars, and wolves sufficient for sport to royalty and death to peasantry. Charles seemed to sit more erect in his saddle, and to drink in joy with every breath of the thyme-scented breeze, from the moment his horse bounded on the hollow-sounding turf; and when he leapt to the ground, with the elastic spring of youth, he held out his hands to Sidney and to Teligny, crying "Welcome, my friends. Here I am indeed a king!"

It was a lovely summer evening, early in August, and Charles bade the supper to be spread under the elms that shaded a green lawn in front of the château. Etiquette was here so far relaxed as to permit the sovereign to dine with his suite, and tables, chairs, and benches were brought out, drapery festooned in the trees to keep off sun and wind, the King lay down in the fern and let his happy dogs fondle him, and as a herd-gird passed along a vista in the distance, driving her goats before her, Philip Sidney marvelled whether it was not even thus in Arcadia.

Presently there was a sound of horses trampling, wheels moving, a party of gaily gilded archers of the guard jingled up, and in their midst was a coach. Berenger's heart seemed to leap at once to his lips, as a glimpse of ruffs, hats, and silks dawned on him through the windows.

The King rose from his lair among the fern, the Admiral stood forward, all heads were bared, and from the coach-door alighted the young Queen; no longer pale, subdued, and indifferent, but with a face shining

with girlish delight, as she held out her hand to the Admiral. "Ah! this is well, this is beautiful," she exclaimed; "it is like our happy chases in the Tyrol. Ah, Sire!" to the King, "how I thank you for letting me be with you."

After her Majesty descended her gentleman-usher. Then came the lady-in-waiting, Madame de Sauve, the wife of the state secretary in attendance on Charles, and a triumphant, coquettish beauty, then a fat, good-humoured Austrian dame, always called Madame la Comtesse, because her German name was unpronounceable, and without whom the Queen never stirred, and lastly a little figure, rounded yet slight, slender yet soft and plump, with a kitten-like alertness and grace of motion, as she sprang out, collected the Queen's properties of fan, kerchief, pouncet-box, mantle, &c., and disappeared into the château, without Berenger's being sure of anything but that her little black hat had a rose-coloured feather in it.

The Queen was led to a chair placed under one of the largest trees, and there Charles presented to her such of his gentlemen as she was not yet acquainted with, the Baron de Ribaumont among the rest.

"I have heard of M. de Ribaumont," she said, in a tone that made the colour mantle in his fair cheek; and with a sign of her hand she detained him at her side till the King had strolled away with Madame la Sauve, and no one remained near but her German countess.

Then changing her tone to one of confidence, which the highbred homeliness of her Austrian manner rendered inexpressibly engaging, she said, "I must apologize, monsieur, for the giddiness of my sister-in-law, which I fear caused you some embarrassment."

"Ah, madame," said Berenger, kneeling on one knee as she addressed him, and his heart bounding with wild,

undefined hope, "I cannot be grateful enough. It was that which led to my being undeceived."

"It was true, then, that you were mistaken?" said the Queen.

"Treacherously deceived, madame, by those whose interest it is to keep us apart," said Berenger, colouring with indignation; "they imposed my other cousin on me as my wife, and caused her to think me cruelly neglectful."

"I know," said the Queen. "Yet Mlle. de Ribau-mont is far more admired than my little blackbird."

"That may be, madame, but not by me."

"Yet is it true that you came to break off the marriage?"

"Yes, madame," said Berenger, honestly, "but I had not seen her."

"And now?" said the Queen, smiling.

"I would rather die than give her up," said Berenger. "Oh, madame, help us of your grace. Every one is trying to part us, every one is arguing against us, but she is my own true wedded wife, and if you will but give her to me, all will be well."

"I like you, M. de Ribaumont," said the Queen, looking him full in the face. "You are like our own honest Germans at my home, and I think you mean all you say. I had much rather my dear little Nid-de-Merle were with you than left here, to become like all the others. She is a good little *Liebling*—how do you call it in French? She has told me all, and truly I would help you with all my heart, but it is not as if I were the Queen-mother. You must have recourse to the King, who loves you well, and at my request included you in the hunting-party."

Berenger could only kiss her hand in token of earnest thanks before the repast was announced, and the King came to lead her to the table spread beneath the

trees. The whole party supped together, but Berenger could have only a distant view of his little wife, looking very demure and grave by the side of the Admiral.

But when the meal was ended, there was a loitering in the woodland paths, amid heathy openings or glades trimmed into discreet wildness fit for royal rusticity; the sun set in parting glory on one horizon, the moon rising in crimson majesty on the other. A musician at intervals touched the guitar, and sang Spanish or Italian airs, whose soft or quaint melody came dreamily through the trees. Then it was that with beating heart Berenger stole up to the maiden as she stood behind the Queen, and ventured to whisper her name and clasp her hand.

She turned, their eyes met, and she let him lead her apart into the wood. It was not like a lover's tryst, it was more like the continuation of their old childish terms, only that he treated her as a thing of his own, that he was bound to secure and to guard, and she received him as her own lawful but tardy protector, to be treated with perfect reliance but with a certain playful resentment.

"You will not run away from me now," he said, making full prize of her hand and arm.

"Ah! is not she the dearest and best of queens?" and the large eyes were lifted up to him in such frank seeking of sympathy that he could see into the depths of their clear darkness.

"It is her doing then. Though, Eustacie, when I knew the truth, not flood nor fire should keep me long from you, my heart, my love, my wife."

"What! wife in spite of those villanous letters?" she said, trying to pout.

"Wife for ever, inseparably! Only you must be able to swear that you knew nothing of the one that brought me here."

"Poor me! No, indeed! There was Céline carried off at fourteen, Madame de Blanchet a bride at fifteen; all marrying hither and thither; and I—" she pulled a face irresistibly droll—"I growing old enough to dress St. Catherine's hair, and wondering where was M. le Baron."

"They thought me too young," said Berenger, "to take on me the cares of life."

"So they were left to me?"

"Cares! what cares have you but finding the Queen's fan?"

"Little you know!" she said, half contemptuous, half mortified.

"Nay, pardon me, *mamie*. Who has troubled you?"

"Ah! you would call it nothing to be beset by Narcisse; to be told ones husband is faithless, till one half believes it; to be looked at by ugly eyes; to be liable to be teased any day by Monsieur, or worse, by that mocking ape, M. d'Alençon, and to have nobody who can or will hinder it."

She was sobbing by this time, and he exclaimed, "Ah, would that I could revenge all! Never, never shall it be again! What blessed grace has guarded you through all?"

"Did I not belong to you?" she said exultingly. "And had not Sister Monique, yes, and M. le Baron, striven hard to make me good? Ah, how kind he was!"

"My father? Yes, Eustacie, he loved you to the last. He bade me, on his deathbed, give you his own Book of Psalms, and tell you he had always loved and prayed for you."

"Ah! his Psalms! I shall love them! Even at Bellaise, when first we came there, we used to sing them, but the Mother Abbess went out visiting, and when she came back she said they were heretical.

And Sœur Monique would not let me say the texts he taught me, but I *would* not forget them. I say them often in my heart."

"Then," he cried joyfully, "you will willingly embrace my religion?"

"Be a Huguenot?" she said distastefully.

"I am not precisely a Huguenot; I do not love them," he answered hastily; "but all shall be made clear to you at my home in England."

"England!" she said. "Must we live in England? Away from every one?"

"Ah, they will love you so much! I shall make you so happy there," he answered. "There you will see what it is to be true and trustworthy."

"I had rather live at Château Leurre, or my own Nid-de-Merle," she replied. "There I should see Sœur Monique, and my aunt, the Abbess, and we would have the peasants to dance in the castle-court. Oh! if you could but see the orchards at Le Bocage, you would never want to go away. And we could come now and then to see my dear Queen."

"I am glad at least you would not live at Court."

"Oh, no, I have been more unhappy here than ever I knew could be borne."

And a very few words from him drew out all that had happened to her since they parted. Her father had sent her to Bellaise, a convent founded by the first of the Angevin branch, which was presided over by his sister, and where Diane was also educated. The good sister Monique had been mistress of the *pensionnaires*, and had evidently taken much pains to keep her charge innocent and devout. Diane had been taken to Court about two years before, but Eustacie had remained at the convent till some three months since, when she had been appointed maid of honour to the recently-married Queen; and her uncle had fetched her

from Anjou, and had informed her at the same time that her young husband had turned Englishman and heretic, and that after a few formalities had been complied with, she would become the wife of her cousin Narcisse. Now there was no person whom she so much dreaded as Narcisse, and when Berenger spoke of him as a feeble fop, she shuddered as though she knew him to have something of the tiger.

"Do you remember Bénéît?" she said; "poor Bénéît, who came to Normandy as my *laquais*? When I went back to Anjou he married a girl from Leurre, and went to aid his father at the farm. The poor fellow had imbibed the Baron's doctrine—he spread it. It was reported that there was a nest of Huguenots on the estate. My cousin came to break it up with his gens d'armes. O Berenger, he would hear no entreaties, he had no mercy; he let them assemble on Sunday, that they might be all together. He fired the house; shot down those who escaped; if a prisoner were made, gave him up to the Bishop's Court. Bénéît, my poor good Bénéît, who used to lead my palfrey, was first wounded, then tried, and burnt—burnt in the *place* at Luçon! I heard Narcisse laugh—laugh as he talked of the cries of the poor creatures in the conventicle. My own people, who loved me! I was but twelve years old, but even then the wretch would pay me a half-mocking courtesy, as one destined to him; and the more I disdained him and said I belonged to you, the more he and my aunt, the Abbess, smiled, as though they had their bird in a cage; but they left me in peace till my uncle brought me to Court, and then all began again: and when they said you gave me up, I had no hope, not even of a convent. But ah, it is all over now, and I am so happy! You are grown so gentle and so beautiful, Berenger, and so much taller than I ever figured you to myself, and you look as

if you could take me up in your arms, and let no harm happen to me."

"Never, never shall it!" said Berenger, feeling all manhood, strength, and love stir within him, and growing many years in heart in that happy moment. "My sweet little faithful wife, never fear again now you are mine."

Alas! poor children. They were a good way from the security they had begun to fancy for themselves. Early the next morning, Berenger went in his straightforward way to the King, thanked him, and requested his sanction for at once producing themselves to the Court as Monsieur le Baron and Madame la Baronne de Ribaumont.

At this Charles swore a great oath, as one in perplexity, and bade him not go so fast.

"See here," said he, with the rude expletives only too habitual with him; "she is a pretty little girl, and she and her lands are much better with an honest man like you than with that *pendard* of a cousin; but you see he is bent on having her, and he belongs to a cut-throat crew that halt at nothing. I would not answer for your life, if you tempted him so strongly to rid himself of you."

"My own sword, Sire, can guard my life."

"Plague upon your sword! What does the foolish youth think it would do against half-a-dozen poniards and pistols in a lane black as hell's mouth?"

The foolish youth *was* thinking how could a king so full of fiery words and strange oaths bear to make such an avowal respecting his own capital and his own courtiers. All he could do was to bow and reply, "Nevertheless, Sire, at whatever risk, I cannot relinquish my wife; I would take her at once to the Ambassador's."

"How, sir!" interrupted Charles, haughtily and

angrily, "if you forget that you are a French nobleman still, I should remember it! The Ambassador may protect his own countrymen—none else."

"I entreat your Majesty's pardon," said Berenger, anxious to retract his false step. "It was your goodness and the gracious Queen's that made me hope for your sanction."

"All the sanction Charles de Valois can give is yours, and welcome," said the King, hastily. "The sanction of the King of France is another matter! To say the truth, I see no way out of the affair but an elopement."

"Sire!" exclaimed the astonished Berenger, whose strictly-disciplined education had little prepared him for such counsel.

"Look you! If I made you known as a wedded pair, the Chevalier and his son would not only assassinate you, but down on me would come my brother, and my mother, and M. de Guise, and all their crew, veritably for giving the prize out of the mouth of their satellite, but nominally for disregarding the Pope, favouring a heretical marriage, and I know not what, but, as things go here, I should assuredly get the worst of it; and if you made safely off with your prize, no one could gainsay you—I need know nothing about it—and lady and lands would be yours without dispute. You might ride off from the skirts of the forest; I would lead the hunt that way, and the three days' riding would bring you to Normandy, for you had best cross to England immediately. When she is once there, owned by your kindred, Monsieur le cousin may gnash his teeth as he will, he must make the best of it for the sake of the honour of his house, and you can safely come back and raise her people and yours to follow the Oriflamme when it takes the field against Spain. What! you are still discontented? Speak

out! Plain speaking is a treat not often reserved for me."

"Sire, I am most grateful for your kindness, but I should greatly prefer going straightforward."

"Peste! Well is it said that a blundering Englishman goes always right before him! There, then! As your King on the one hand, as the friend who has brought you and your wife together, sir, it is my command that you do not compromise me and embroil greater matters than you can understand by publicly claiming this girl. Privately I will aid you to the best of my ability; publicly, I command you, for my sake, if you heed not your own, to be silent!"

Berenger sought out Sidney, who smiled at his surprise.

"Do you not see," he said, "that the King is your friend, and would be very glad to save the lady's lands from the Guisards, but that he cannot say so; he can only befriend a Huguenot by stealth."

"I would not be such a king for worlds!"

However, Eustacie was enchanted. It was like a prince and princess in Mère Perinne's fairy tales. Could they go like a shepherd and shepherdess? She had no fears—no scruples. Would she not be with her husband? It was the most charming frolic in the world. So the King seemed to think it, though he was determined to call it all the Queen's doing—the first intrigue of her own, making her like all the rest of us—the Queen's little comedy. He undertook to lead the chase as far as possible in the direction of Normandy, when the young pair might ride on to an inn, meet fresh horses, and proceed to Château Leurre, and thence to England. He would himself provide a safe conduct, which, as Berenger suggested, would represent them as a young Englishman taking home his young wife. Eustacie wanted at least to masquerade

as an Englishwoman, and played off all the fragments of the language she had caught as a child, but Berenger only laughed at her, and said they just fitted the French bride. It was very pretty to laugh at Eustacie; she made such a droll pretence at pouting with her rosebud lips, and her merry velvety eyes belied them so drolly.

Such was to be the Queen's pastoral; but when Elisabeth found the responsibility so entirely thrown on her, she began to look grave and frightened. It was no doubt much more than she had intended when she brought about the meeting between the young people, and the King, who had planned the elopement, seemed still resolved to make all appear her affair. She looked all day more like the grave, spiritless being she was at Court than like the bright young rural queen of the evening before, and she was long in her little oratory chapel in the evening. Berenger, who was waiting in the hall with the other Huguenot gentlemen, thought her devotions interminable since they delayed all her ladies. At length, however, a page came up to him, and said in a low voice, "The Queen desires the presence of M. le Baron de Ribau-mont."

He followed the messenger, and found himself in the little chapel, before a gaily-adorned altar, and numerous little shrines and niches round. Sidney would have dreaded a surreptitious attempt to make him conform, but Berenger had no notion of such perils—he only saw that Eustacie was standing by the Queen's chair; the King sat carelessly, perhaps a little sullenly, in another chair, and a kindly-looking Austrian priest, the Queen's confessor, held a book in his hand.

The Queen came to meet him. "For my sake," she said, with all her sweetness, "to ease my mind, I should like to see my little Eustacie made entirely your own ere you go. Father Meinhard tells me it is safer

that, when the parties were under twelve years old, the troth should be again exchanged. No other ceremony is needed."

"I desire nothing but to have her made indissolubly my own," said Berenger, bowing.

"And the King permits," added Elisabeth.

The King growled out, "It is your comedy, Madame; I meddle not."

The Austrian priest had no common language with Berenger but Latin. He asked a few questions, and on hearing the answers, declared that the sacrament of marriage had been complete, but that—as was often done in such cases—he would once more hear the troth-plight of the young pair. The brief formula was therefore at once exchanged—the King, when the Queen looked entreatingly at him, rousing himself to make the bride over to Berenger. As soon as the vows had been made, in the briefest manner, the King broke in boisterously: "There, you are twice married, to please Madame there; but hold your tongues all of you about this scene in the play."

Then almost pushing Eustacie over to Berenger, he added, "There she is! take your wife, sir: but mind, she was as much yours before as she is now."

But for all Berenger had said about "his wife," it was only now that he really *felt* her his own, and became husband rather than lover—man instead of boy. She was entirely his own now, and he only desired to be away with her; but some days' delay was necessary.

When Charles undertook to rehearse their escape with them, and the Queen drove out in a little high-wheeled litter with Mme. la Comtesse, while Mme. de Sauve and Eustacie were mounted on gay palfreys with the pommelled side-saddle lately invented by the Queen-mother, Berenger, as he watched the fearless horsemanship and graceful bearing of his newly-won

wife, had no speculations to spend on the thoughtful face of the Admiral. And when at the outskirts of the wood the King's bewildering hunting-horn—sounding as it were now here, now there, now low, now high—called every attendant to hasten to its summons, leaving the young squire and damsel errant with a long winding high-banked lane before them, they reckoned the dispersion to be all for their sakes, and did not note, as did Sidney's clear eye, that when the entire company had come straggling home, it was the King who came up with Mme. de Sauve almost the last; and a short space after, as if not to appear to have been with him, appeared the Admiral and his son-in-law.

Sidney also missed one of the Admiral's most trusted attendants, and from this and other symptoms he formed his conclusions that the King had scattered his followers as much for the sake of an unobserved conference with Coligny as for the convenience of the lovers, and that letters had been despatched in consequence of that meeting.

Those letters were indeed of a kind to change the face of affairs in France. Marshal Strozzi, then commanding in the south-west, was bidden to embark at La Rochelle in the last week of August, to hasten to the succour of the Prince of Orange against Spain, and letters were despatched by Coligny to all the Huguenot partisans bidding them assemble at Melun on the 3d of September.

At that time they would be in the immediate neighbourhood of the Court, which was bound for Fontainebleau. Was the star of the Guises indeed waning? Was Charles about to escape from their hands, and commit himself to an honest, high-minded policy, in which he might have been able to purify his national Church, and win back to her those whom her

corruptions had driven to seek truth and morality beyond her pale?

Alas! there was a bright pair of eyes that saw more than Philip Sidney's, a pair of ears that heard more, a tongue and pen less faithful to guard a secret.

CHAPTER VIII

"LE BROUILLON"

"But never more the same two sister pearls
Ran down the silken thread to kiss each other."
TENNYSON.

BERENGER was obliged to crave permission from the King to spend some hours in riding with Osbert to the first hostel on their way, to make arrangements for the relay of horses that was to meet them there, and for the reception of Véronique, Eustacie's maid, who was to be sent off very early in the morning on a pinion behind Osbert, taking with her the articles of dress that would be wanted to change her mistress from the huntress maid of honour to the English dame.

It was not long after he had been gone that a sound of wheels and trampling horses was heard in one of the forest drives. Charles, who was amusing himself with shooting at a mark together with Sidney and Telnigny, handed his weapon to an attendant, and came up with looks of restless anxiety to his Queen, who was placed in her chair under the tree, with the Admiral and her ladies round her, as judges of the prize.

"Here is *le brouillon*," he muttered. I thought we had been left in peace too long."

Elisabeth, who Brantôme says was water, while her husband was fire, tried to murmur some hopeful suggestion; and poor little Eustacie, clasping her hands, could scarcely refrain from uttering the cry, "Oh, it is my uncle! Do not let him take me!"

The next minute there appeared four horses greatly heated and jaded, drawing one of the Court coaches; and as it stopped at the castle gate, two ladies became visible within it—the portly form of Queen Catherine, and on the back seat the graceful figure of Diane de Ribauumont.

Charles swore a great oath under his breath. He made a step forward, but then his glance falling on Eustacie's face, which had flushed to the rosiest hue of the carnation, he put his finger upon his lip with a menacing air, and then advanced to greet his mother, followed by his gentlemen.

"Fear not, my dear child," said the young Queen, taking Eustacie's arm as she rose for the same purpose. "Obey the King, and he will take care that all goes well."

The gentle Elisabeth was, however, the least regarded member of the royal family. Her mother-in-law had not even waited to greet her, but had hurried the King into his cabinet, with a precipitation that made the young Queen's tender heart conclude that some dreadful disaster had occurred, and before Mademoiselle de Ribauumont had had time to make her reverence, she exclaimed, breathlessly, "Oh, is it ill news? Not from Vienna?"

"No, no, Madame; reassure yourself," replied Diane; "it is merely that her Majesty being on the way to Monceaux with Mesdames turned out of her road to make a flying visit to your graces, and endeavor to persuade you to make her party complete."

Elisabeth looked as if questioning with herself if this would possibly be the whole explanation. Monceaux was a castle belonging to the Queen Dowager at no great distance from Montpipeau, but there had been no intention of leaving Paris before the wedding, which was fixed for the seventeenth of August, and

the bridegroom was daily expected. She asked who was the party at Monceaux, and was told that Madame de Nemours had gone thither the evening before, with her son, M. de Guise, to make ready; and that Monsieur was escorting thither his two sisters, Madame de Lorraine and Madame Marguerite. The Queen-mother had set out before them very early in the morning.

"You must have made great speed," said Elisabeth; "it is scarcely two o'clock."

"Truly we did, Madame; two of our horses even died upon the road; but the Queen was anxious to find the King ere he should set off on one of his long chases."

Diane, at every spare moment, kept her eyes interrogatively fixed on her cousin, and evidently expected that the taciturn Queen, to whom a long conversation, in any language but Spanish, was always a grievance, would soon dismiss them both; and Eustacie did not know whether to be thankful or impatient, as Elisabeth, with tardy, hesitating, mentally-translated speech, inquired into every circumstance of the death of the poor horses, and then into all the Court gossip, which she was currently supposed neither to hear nor understand; and then bethought herself that this good Mademoiselle de Ribaumont could teach her that embroidery stitch she had so long wished to learn. Taking her arm, she entered the hall, and produced her work, so as effectually to prevent any communication between the cousins; Eustacie, meanwhile her heart clinging to her friend, felt her eyes filling with tears at the thoughts of how unkind her morrow's flight would seem without one word of farewell or of confidence, and was already devising tokens of tenderness to be left behind for Diane's consolation, when the door of the cabinet opened, and Catherine sailed down

the stairs, with her peculiar gliding step and sweep of dignity. The King followed her with a face of irresolution and distress. He was evidently under her displeasure; but she advanced to the young Queen with much graciousness, and an air of matronly solicitude.

"My daughter," she said, "I have just assured the King that I cannot leave you in these damp forests. I could not be responsible for the results of the exposure any longer. It is for him to make his own arrangements, but I brought my coach empty on purpose to transport you and your ladies to Monceaux. The women may follow with the mails. You can be ready as soon as the horses are harnessed."

Elisabeth was used to passiveness. She turned one inquiring look to her husband, but he looked sullen, and, evidently cowed by his mother, uttered not a word. She could only submit, and Catherine herself added that there was room for Madame de Sauve and Mademoiselle de Nid-de-Merle. Madame la Comtesse should follow! It was self-evident that propriety would not admit of the only demoiselle being left behind among the gentlemen. Poor Eustacie, she looked mutely round as if she hoped to escape! What was the other unkindness to this? And ever under the eyes of Diane too, who followed her to their chamber, when she went to prepare, so that she could not even leave a token for him where he would have been most certain to find it. Moments were few; but at the very last, while the queens were being handed in the carriage, she caught the eye of Philip Sidney. He saw the appealing look, and came near. She tried to laugh. "Here is my gage, Monsieur Sidney," she said, and held out a rose-coloured knot of ribbon; then, as he came near enough, she whispered imploringly three of her few English words—

"Give to *him*."

"I take the gage as it is meant," said Sidney, putting a knee to the ground, and kissing the trembling fingers, ere he handed her into the carriage. He smiled and waved his hand as he met her earnest eyes. One bow contained a scrap of paper pricked with needle-holes. Sidney would not have made out those pricks for the whole world, even had he been able to do more than hastily secure the token, before the unhappy King, with a paroxysm of violent interjections, demanded of him whether the Queen of England, woman though she were, ever were so beset, and never allowed a moment to herself; then, without giving time for an answer, he flung away to his cabinet, and might be heard pacing up and down there in a tempest of perplexity. He came forth only to order his horse, and desire M. de Sauve and a few grooms to be ready instantly to ride with him. His face was full of pitiable perplexity—the smallest obstacle was met with a savage oath; and he was evidently in all the misery of a weak yet passionate nature, struggling with impotent violence against a yoke that evidently mastered it.

He flung a word to his guests that he should return ere night, and they thus perceived that he did not intend their dismissal.

"Poor youth," said Coligny, mildly, "he will be another being when we have him in our camp with the King of Navarre for his companion."

And then the Admiral repaired to his chamber to write one of his many fond letters to the young wife of his old age; while his son-in-law and Philip Sidney agreed to ride on, so as to meet poor young Ribaumont, and prepare him for the blow that had befallen him personally, while they anxiously debated what this sudden descent of the Queen-mother might portend. Teligny was ready to believe in any evil intention on

her part, but he thought himself certain of the King's real sentiments, and in truth Charles had never treated any man with such confidence as this young Huguenot noble, to whom he had told his opinion of each of his counsellors, and his complete distrust of all. That pitying affection which clings to those who cling to it, as well as a true French loyalty of heart, made Teligny fully believe that however Catherine might struggle to regain her ascendancy, and whatever apparent relapses might be caused by Charles's habitual subjection to her, yet the high aspirations and strong sense of justice inherent in the King were asserting themselves as his youth was passing into manhood; and that the much desired war would enable him to develop all his higher qualities. Sidney listened, partially agreed, talked of caution, and mused within himself whether violence might not sometimes be mistaken for vigour.

Ere long, the merry cadence of an old English song fell with a homelike sound upon Sidney's ear, and in another moment they were in sight of Berenger, trotting joyously along, with a bouquet of crimson and white heather-blossoms in his hand, and his bright young face full of exultation in his arrangements. He shouted gaily as he saw them, calling out, "I thought I should meet you! but I wondered not to have heard the King's bugle-horn. Where are the rest of the hunters?"

"Unfortunately we have had another sort of hunt to-day," said Sidney, who had ridden forward to meet him; "and one that, I fear, will disquiet you greatly."

"How! Not her uncle?" exclaimed Berenger.

"No, cheer up, my friend, it was not she who was the object of the chase; it was this unlucky King," he added, speaking English, "who has been run to earth by his mother."

"Nay, but what is that to me?" said Berenger, with

impatient superiority to the affairs of the nation. "How does it touch us?"

Sidney related the abstraction of the young Queen and her ladies, and then handed over the rose-coloured token, which Berenger took with vehement ardour; then his features quivered as he read the needle-pricked words—two that he had playfully insisted on her speaking and spelling after him in his adopted tongue, then not vulgarized, but the tenderest in the language, "Sweet heart." That was all, but to him they conveyed constancy to him and his, whatever might betide, and an entreaty not to leave her to her fate.

"My dearest! never!" he muttered; then turning hastily as he put the precious token into his bosom, he exclaimed, "Are their women yet gone?" and being assured that they were not departed when the two friends had set out, he pushed his horse on at speed, so as to be able to send a reply by Véronique. He was barely in time: the clumsy wagon-like conveyance of the waiting-women stood at the door of the castle, in course of being packed with the Queen's wardrobe, amid the janglings of lackeys, and expostulating cries of *femmes de chambre*, all in the worst possible humour at being crowded up with their natural enemies, the household of the Queen-mother.

Véronique, a round-faced Angevin girl—who, like her lady, had not parted with all her rustic simplicity and honesty, and who had been necessarily taken into their confidence—was standing apart from the whirl of confusion, holding the leashes of two or three little dogs that had been confided to her care, that their keepers might with more ease throw themselves into the *mêlée*. Her face lighted up as she saw the Baron de Ribaimont arrive.

"Ah, sir, Madame will be so happy that I have seen

Monsieur once more," she exclaimed under her breath, as he approached her.

"Alas! there is not a moment to write," he said, looking at the vehicle, already fast filling, "but give her these flowers; they were gathered for her; give her ten thousand thanks for her token. Tell her to hold firm, and that neither king nor queen, bolt nor bar, shall keep me from her. Tell her, our watchword is *hope*."

The sharp eyes of the duenna of the Queen's household, a rigid Spanish dame, were already searching for stray members of her flock, and Véronique had to hurry to her place, while Berenger remained to hatch new plans, each wilder than the last, and torment himself with guesses whether his project had been discovered. Indeed, there were moments when he fancied the frustration of his purpose the special object of Queen Catherine's journey, but he had the wisdom to keep any such suggestion to himself.

The King came back by supper-time, looking no longer in a state of indecision, but pale and morose. He spoke to no one as he entered, and afterwards took his place at the head of the supper-table in silence, which he did not break till the meal was nearly over. Then he said abruptly, "Gentlemen, our party has been broken up, and I imagine that after our great hunt to-morrow, no one will have any objection to return to Paris. We shall have merrier sport at Fontainebleau when this most troublesome of weddings is over."

Charles then threw himself round towards Berenger, and said, "Here; stoop down, Ribaumont; a word with you. Your matters have gone up the mountains, as the Italians say, with mine. But never fear. Keep silence, and you shall have the bird in your hand, only you must be patient. Hold! I will make you and

Monsieur Sidney gentlemen of my bed-chamber, which will give you the *entrée* of the Louvre; and if you cannot get her out of it without an *éclat*, then you must be a much duller fellow than half my Court. Only that it is not their own wives that they abstract."

With this Berenger must needs content himself; and the certainty of the poor King's good will did enable him to do his part with Sidney in the songs that endeavoured to soothe the torments of the evil spirit which had on that day effected a fresh lodgment in that weak, unwilling heart.

It was not till the memoirs of the secret actors in this tragedy were brought to light that the key to these doings was discovered. M. de Sauve, Charles's secretary, had disclosed his proceedings to his wife; she, flattered by the attentions of the Duke of Anjou, betrayed them to him; and the Queen-mother, terrified at the change of policy, and the loss of the power she had enjoyed for so many years, had hurried to the spot.

CHAPTER IX

THE WEDDING WITH CRIMSON FAVOURS

"And trust me not at all or all in all."

TENNYSON.

SO extensive was the Louvre, so widely separated the different suites of apartments, that Diane and Eustacie had not met after the pall-mall party till they sat opposite to their several queens in the coach driving through the woods, the elder cousin curiously watching the eyes of the younger, so wistfully gazing at the window, and now and then rapidly winking as though to force back a rebellious tear.

The cousins had been bred up together in the convent at Bellaise, and had only been separated by Diane's having been brought to Court two years sooner than Eustacie. They had always been on very kindly, affectionate terms: Diane treating her little cousin with the patronage of an elder sister, and greatly contributing to shield her from the temptations of the Court. The elder cousin was so much the more handsome, brilliant, and admired, that no notion of rivalry had crossed her mind; and Eustacie's inheritance was regarded by her as reserved for her brother, and the means of aggrandizement and prosperity for herself and her father. She looked upon the child as a sort of piece of property of the family, to be guarded and watched over for her brother; and when she had first discovered the error that the young baron was making between the two daughters of the house, it was partly

in kindness to Eustacie, partly to carry out her father's plans, and partly from her own pleasure in conversing with anything so candid and fresh as Berenger, that she had maintained the delusion. Her father believed himself to have placed Berenger so entirely in the background, that he would hardly be at Court long enough to discover the imposition; and Diane was not devoid of a strong hope of winning his affection and bending his will so as to induce him to become her husband, and become a French courtier for her sake—a wild dream, but a better castle in the air than she had ever yet indulged in.

This arrangement was, however, disconcerted by the King's passion for Sidney's society, which brought young Ribaultmont also to Court; and at the time of the mischievous introduction by Madame Marguerite, Diane had perceived that the mistake would soon be found out, and that she should no longer be able to amuse herself with the fresh-coloured, open-faced boy who was so unlike all her former acquaintance; but the magnetism that shows a woman when she produces an effect had been experienced by her, and she had been sure that a few efforts more would warm and mould the wax in her fingers. That he should prefer a little brown thing, whose beauty was so inferior to her own, had never crossed her mind; she did not even know that he was invited to the pall-mall party, and was greatly taken by surprise when her father sought an interview with her, accused her of betraying their interests, and told her that this foolish young fellow declared that he had been mistaken, and having now discovered his veritable wife, protested against resigning her.

By that time the whole party were gone to Mont-pipeau, but that the Baron was among them was not known at the Louvre until Queen Catherine, who had



"EUSTACIE SHRANK FROM HER, AND TRIED TO AVOID A
PRIVATE INTERVIEW"

always treated Diane as rather a favoured, quick-witted *protégée*, commanded her attendance, and on her way let her know that Madame de Sauve had reported that, among all the follies that were being perpetrated at the hunting-seat, the young Queen was absolutely throwing the little Nid-de-Merle into the arms of her Huguenot husband, and that if measures were not promptly taken all the great estates in the Bocage would be lost to the young Chevalier, and be carried over to the Huguenot interest.

Still Diane could not believe that it was so much a matter of love as that the youth had begun to relish Court favour and to value the inheritance, and she could quite believe her little cousin had been flattered by a few attentions that had no meaning in them. She was not prepared to find that Eustacie shrank from her, and tried to avoid a private interview. In truth, the poor child had received such injunctions from the Queen, and so stern a warning look from the King, that she durst not utter a syllable of the evening that had sealed her lot, and was so happy with her secret, so used to tell everything to Diane, so longing to talk of her husband, that she was afraid of betraying herself if once they were alone together. Yet Diane, knowing that her father trusted to her to learn how far things had gone, and piqued at seeing the transparent little creature, now glowing and smiling with inward bliss, now pale, pensive, sighing, and anxious, and scorning her as too childish for the love that she seemed to affect, was resolved on obtaining confidence from her.

And when the whole female Court had sat down to the silk embroidery in which Catherine de Medicis excelled, Diane seated herself in the recess of a window and beckoned her cousin to her side, so that it was not possible to disobey.

"Little one," she said, "why have you cast off your poor cousin? There, sit down"—for Eustacie stood, with her silk in her hand, as if meaning instantly to return to her former place; and now, her cheeks in a flame, she answered in an indignant whisper, "You know, Diane! How could you try to keep him from me?"

"Because it was better for thee, my child, than to be pestered with an adventurer," she said, smiling, though bitterly.

"My husband!" returned Eustacie proudly.

"Bah! You know better than that!" Then, as Eustacie was about to speak, but checked herself, Diane added, "Yes, my poor friend, he has a something engaging about him, and we all would have hindered you from the pain and embarrassment of a meeting with him."

Eustacie smiled a little saucy smile, as though infinitely superior to them all.

"*Pauvre petite*," said Diane, nettled; "she actually believes in his love."

"I will not hear a word against my husband!" said Eustacie, stepping back, as if to return to her place, but Diane rose and laid her hand on hers. "My dear," she said, "we must not part thus. I only wish to know what touches my darling so nearly. I thought she loved and clung to us; why should she have turned from me for the sake of one who forgot her for half his life? What can he have done to master this silly little heart?"

"I cannot tell you, Diane," said Eustacie simply; and though she looked down, the colour on her face was more of a happy glow than a conscious blush. "I love him too much; only we understand each other now, and it is of no use to try to separate us."

"Ah, poor little thing, so she thinks," said Diane;

and as Eustacie again smiled as one incapable of being shaken in her conviction, she added, "And how do you know that he loves you?"

Diane was startled by the bright eyes that flashed on her and the bright colour that made Eustacie perfectly beautiful, as she answered, "Because I am his wife! That is enough!" Then, before her cousin could speak again, "But, Diane, I promised not to speak of it. I know he would despise me if I broke my word, so I will not talk to you till I have leave to tell you all, and I am going back to help Gabrielle de Limeuil with her shepherdess."

Mademoiselle de Ribaumont felt her attempt most unsatisfactory, but she knew of old that Eustacie was very determined—all Bellaise knew that to oppose the tiny Baronne was to make her headstrong in her resolution; and if she suspected that she was coaxed, she only became more obstinate. To make any discoveries, Diane must take the line of most cautious caresses, such as to throw her cousin off her guard; and this she was forced to confess to her father when he sought an interview with her on the day of her return to Paris. He shook his head. "She must be on the watch," he said, and get quickly into the silly girl's confidence. What! had she not found out that the young villain had been on the point of eloping with her? If such a thing as that should succeed, the whole family was lost, and she was the only person who could prevent it. He trusted to her.

The Chevalier had evidently come to regard his niece as his son's lawful property, and the Baron as the troublesome meddler; and Diane had much the same feeling, enhanced by sore jealousy at Eustacie's triumph over her, and curiosity as to whether it could be indeed well founded.

The King of Navarre, the royal bridegroom, had

entered Paris in state that afternoon. Eustacie was gratified to mark certain wanderings of the eye even while the gracious King was speaking. Then the Admiral said something that brought the girlish rosy flush up to the very roots of the short curls of flaxen hair, and made the young King's white teeth flash out in a mirthful, good-natured laugh, and thereupon the way opened, and Berenger was beside the two ladies, kissing Eustacie's hand, but merely bowing to Diane.

The wedding was followed by a ball at the Louvre, from which, however, all the stricter Huguenots absented themselves out of respect to Sunday, and among them the family and guests of the English Ambassador, who were in the meantime attending the divine service that had been postponed on account of the morning's ceremony. Neither was the Duke of Guise present at the entertainment; for though he had some months previously been piqued and entrapped into a marriage with Catherine of Cleves, yet his passion for Marguerite was still so strong that he could not bear to join in the festivities of her wedding with another. The absence of so many distinguished persons caused the admission of many less constantly privileged, and thus it was that Diane there met both her father and brother, who eagerly drew her into a window, and demanded what she had to tell them, laughing too at the simplicity of the youth, who had left for the Chevalier a formal announcement that he had despatched his protest to Rome, and considered himself as free to obtain his wife by any means in his power.

"Where is *la petite?*" Narcisse demanded. "Behind her Queen, as usual?"

"The young Queen keeps her room to-night," returned Diane. "Nor do I advise you, brother, to thrust yourself in the way of *la petite entêtée* just at present."

"What, is she so besotted with the peach face? He shall pay for it!"

"Brother, no duel. Father, remind him that she would never forgive him."

"Fear not, daughter," said the Chevalier; "this folly can be ended by much quieter modes, only you must first give us information."

"She tells me nothing," said Diane; "she is in one of her own humours—high and mighty."

"*Peste!* where is your vaunt of winding the little one round your finger?"

"With time, I said," replied Diane. Curiously enough, she had no compunction in worming secrets from Eustacie and betraying them, but she could not bear to think of the trap she had set for the unsuspecting youth, and how ingenuously he had thanked her, little knowing how she had listened to his inmost secrets.

"Time is everything," said her father; "delay will be our ruin. Your inheritance will slip through your fingers, my son. The youth will soon win favour by abjuring his heresy; he will play the same game with the King as his father did with King Henri. You will have nothing but your sword, and for you, my poor girl, there is nothing but to throw yourself on the kindness of your aunt at Bellaise, if she can receive the vows of a dowerless maiden."

"It will never be," said Narcisse. "My rapier will soon dispose of a big rustic like that, who knows just enough of fencing to make him an easy prey. What! I verily believe the great blond has caught her fancy!" as he saw Diane's gesture of entreaty. "And yet the fine fellow was willing enough to break the marriage when he took her for the bride."

"Nay, my son," argued the Chevalier, willing apparently to spare his daughter from the sting of morti-

fication, "as I said, all can be done without danger of bloodshed on either side, were we but aware of any renewed project of elopement. The pretty pair would be easily waylaid, the girl safely lodged at Bellaise, the boy sent off to digest his pride in England."

"Unhurt?" murmured Diane.

Her father checked Narcisse's mockery at her solicitude, as he added, "Unhurt? yes. He is a liberal-hearted, gracious, fine young man, whom I should much grieve to harm; but if you know of any plan of elopement and conceal it, my daughter, then upon you will lie either the ruin and disgrace of your family, or the death of one or both of the youths."

Diane saw that her question had betrayed her knowledge. She spoke faintly. "Something I did overhear, but I know not how to utter a treason."

"There is no treason where there is no trust, daughter," said the Chevalier, in the tone of a moral sage. "Speak!"

Diane never disobeyed her father, and faltered, "Wednesday; it is for Wednesday. They mean to leave the palace in the midst of the masque; there is a market-boat from Leurre to meet them on the river; his servants will be in it."

"On Wednesday!" Father and son looked at each other.

"That shall be remedied," said Narcisse.

"Child," added her father, turning kindly to Diane, "you have saved our fortunes. There is but one thing more that you must do. Make her obtain the pearls from him."

"Ah!" sighed Diane, half shocked, half revengeful, as she thought how he had withheld them from her.

"It is necessary," said the Chevalier. "The heirloom of our house must not be risked. Secure the

pearls, child, and you will have done good service, and earned the marriage that shall reward you."

When he was gone, Diane pressed her hands together with a strange sense of misery. He, who had shrunk from the memory of little Diane's untruthfulness, what would he think of the present Diane's treachery? Yet it was to save his life and that of her brother—and for the assertion of her victory over the little robber, Eustacie.

CHAPTER X

MONSIEUR'S BALLET

"The Styx had fast bound her
Nine times around her."

POPE, *Ode on St. Cecilia's Day*.

EARLY on Monday morning came a message to Mademoiselle Nid-de-Merle that she was to prepare to act the part of a nymph of Paradise in the King's masque on Wednesday night, and must dress at once to rehearse her part in the ballet specially designed by Monsieur.

Her first impulse was to hurry to her own Queen, whom she entreated to find some mode of exempting her. But Elisabeth, who was still in bed, looked distressed and frightened, made signs of caution, and when the weeping girl was on the point of telling her of the project that would thus be ruined, silenced her by saying, "Hush! my poor child, I have but meddled too much already. Our Lady grant that I have not done you more harm than good! Tell me no more."

"Ah! Madame, I will be discreet, I will tell you nothing; but if you would only interfere to spare me from this ballet! It is Monsieur's contrivance! Ah! Madame, could you but speak to the King!"

"Impossible, child," said the Queen. "Things are not here as they were at happy Montpipeau."

And the poor young Queen turned her face in to her pillow, and wept.

Every one who was not in a dream of bliss like poor little Eustacie knew that the King had been in so

savage a mood ever since his return that no one durst ask anything from him. A little while since, he had laughed at his gentle wife for letting herself, an Emperor's daughter, be trampled on where his brother Francis's queen, from her trumpery, beggarly realm, had held up her head, and put down *la belle Mère*; he had amused himself with Elisabeth's pretty little patronage of the young Ribaumonts as a promising commencement in intriguing like other people; but now he was absolutely violent at any endeavour to make him withstand his mother, and had driven his wife back into that cold, listless, indifferent shell of apathy from which affection and hope had begun to rouse her. She knew it would only make it the worse for her little Nid-de-Merle for her to interpose when Monsieur had made the choice.

And Eustacie was more afraid of Monsieur than even of Narcisse, and her Berenger could not be there to protect her. However, there was protection in numbers. With twelve nymphs, and cavaliers to match, even the Duke of Anjou could not accomplish the being very insulting. Eustacie—light, agile, and fairy-like—gained considerable credit for ready comprehension and graceful evolutions. She had never been so much complimented before, and was much cheered by praise. Diane showed herself highly pleased with her little cousin's success, embraced her, and told her she was finding her true level at Court. She would be the prettiest of all the nymphs, who were all small, since fairies rather than Amazons were wanted in their position. "And, Eustacie," she added, "you should wear the pearls."

"The pearls!" said Eustacie. "Ah! but *he* always wears them. I like to see them on his bonnet—they are hardly whiter than his forehead."

"Foolish little thing!" said Diane, "I shall think

little of his love if he cares to see himself in them more than you."

The shaft seemed carelessly shot, but Diane knew that it would work, and so it did. Eustacie wanted to prove her husband's love, not to herself, but to her cousin.

He made his way to her in the gardens of the Louvre that evening, greatly dismayed at the report that had reached him that she was to figure as a nymph of Elysium. She would thus be in sight as a prominent figure the whole evening, even till an hour so late that the market boat which Osbert had arranged for their escape could not wait for them without exciting suspicion, and besides his delicate English feelings were revolted at the notion of her forming a part of such a spectacle. She could not understand his displeasure. If they could not go on Wednesday, they could go on Saturday; and as to her acting, half the noblest ladies in the Court would be in the piece, and if English husbands did not like it, they must be the tyrants she had always heard of.

"To be a gazing-stock——" began Berenger.

"Hush! monsieur, I will hear no more, or I shall take care how I put myself in your power."

"That has been done for you, sweetheart," he said, smiling with perhaps a shade too much superiority; "you are mine entirely now."

"That is not kind," she pouted, almost crying—for between flattery, excitement, and disappointment she was not like herself that day, and she was too proud to like to be reminded that she was in any one's power.

"I thought," said Berenger, with the gentleness that always made him manly in dealing with her, "I thought you liked to own yourself mine."

"Yes, sir, when you are good, and do not try to hector me for what I cannot avoid."

Berenger was candid enough to recollect that royal commands did not brook disobedience, and, being thoroughly enamoured besides of his little wife, he hastened to make his peace by saying, "True, *ma mie*, this cannot be helped. I was a wretch to find fault. Think of it no more."

"You forgive me?" she said, softened instantly.

"Forgive you? What for, pretty one? For my forgetting that you are still a slave to a hateful Court?"

"Ah! then, if you forgive me, let me wear the pearls."

"The poor pearls," said Berenger, taken aback for a moment, "the meed of our forefather's valour, to form part of the pageant and mummary? But never mind, sweetheart," for he could not bear to vex her again; "you shall have them to-night: only take care of them. My mother would look black on me if she knew I had let them out of my care, but you and I are one after all."

Berenger could not bear to leave his wife near the Duke of Anjou and Narcisse, and he offered himself to the King as an actor in the masque, much as he detested all he heard of its subject. The King nodded comprehension, and told him it was open to him either to be a demon in a tight suit of black cloth, with cloven-hoof shoes, a long tail, and a trident; or one of the Huguenots who were to be repulsed from Paradise for the edification of the spectators. As these last were to wear suits of knightly armour, Berenger much preferred making one of them in spite of their doom.

The masque was given at the hall of the Hôtel de Bourbon, where a noble gallery accommodated the audience, and left full space beneath for the actors. Down the centre of the stage flowed a stream, broad enough to contain a boat, which was plied by the Abbé

de Méricour—transformed by a grey beard and hair and dismal mask into Charon.

But so unused to navigation was he, so crazy and ill-trimmed his craft, that his first performance would have been his submersion in the Styx had not Berenger, better accustomed to boats than any of the *dramatis personæ*, caught him by the arm as he was about to step in, pointed out the perils, weighted the frail vessel, and given him a lesson in paddling it to and fro, with such a masterly hand, that, had there been time for a change of dress, the part of Charon would have been unanimously transferred to him; but the delay could not be suffered, and poor Méricour, in fear of a ducking, or worse, of ridicule, balanced himself, pole in hand, in the midst of the river. To the right of the river was Elysium—a circular island revolving on a wheel which was an absolute orrery, representing in concentric circles the skies, with the sun, moon, the seven planets, twelve signs, and the fixed stars, all illuminated with small lamps. The island itself was covered with verdure, in which, among bowers woven of gay flowers, reposed twelve nymphs of Paradise, of whom Eustacie was one.

On the other side of the stream was another wheel, whose grisly emblems were reminders of Dante's infernal circles, and were lighted by lurid flames, while little bells were hung round so as to make a harsh jangling sound, and all of the Court who had any turn for buffoonery were leaping and dancing about as demons beneath it, and uttering wild shouts.

Berenger, with Eustacie before his eyes, looking pale, distressed, and ill at ease, was a great deal too much in earnest. He had so veritable an impulse to leap forward and snatch her from that giddy revolving prison, that he struck against the sword of Monsieur with a hearty good-will. His silvered lath snapped in

his hand, and at that moment he was seized round the waist, and, when his furious struggle was felt to be in earnest, he was pulled over on his back, while yells and shouts of discordant laughter rang round him, as demons pinioned him hand and foot.

He thought he heard a faint cry from Eustacie, and, with a sudden, unexpected struggle, started into a sitting posture; but a derisive voice, that well he knew, cried, "Ha, the deadly sin of pride! Monsieur thinks his painted face pleases the ladies. To the depths with him—" and therewith one imp pulled him backwards again, while others danced a war-dance round him, pointing their forks at him; and the prime tormentor, whom he perfectly recognised, not only leapt over him, but spurned at his face with a cloven foot, giving a blow, not of gay French malice, but of malignity. It was too much for the boy's forbearance. He struggled free, dashing his adversaries aside fiercely, and as they again gathered about him, with the leader shouting, "Rage, too, rage! To the prey, imps—" he clenched his fist, and dealt the foremost foe such a blow on the chest as to level him at once with the ground.

"Monsieur forgets," said a voice, friendly yet reproachful, "that this is but sport."

It was Henry of Navarre himself who spoke, and bent to give a hand to the fallen imp. A flush of shame rushed over Berenger's face, already red with passion. He felt that he had done wrong to use his strength at such a moment, and that, though there had been spite in his assailant, he had not been therefore justified.

He was glad to see Narcisse rise lightly to his feet, evidently unhurt, and, with the frankness with which he had often made it up with Philip Thistlewood or his other English comrades after a sharp tussle, he held out his hand, saying, "Good demon,

your pardon. You roused my spirit, and I forgot myself."

"Demons forget not," was the reply. "At him, imps!" And a whole circle of hobgoblins closed upon him with their tridents, forks, and other horrible implements, to drive him back within two tall barred gates, which, illuminated by red flames, were to form the ghastly prison of the vanquished. Perhaps fresh indignities would have been attempted, had not the King of Navarre thrown himself on his side, shared with him the brunt of all the grotesque weapons, and battled them off with infinite spirit and address, shielding him as it were from their rude insults by his own dexterity and inviolability, though retreating all the time till the infernal gates were closed on both.

Then Henry of Navarre, who never forgot a face, held out his hand, saying, "Tartarus is no region of good omen for friendships, M. de Ribaumont, but, for lack of yonder devil's claw, here is mine. I like to meet a comrade who can strike a hearty blow, and ask a hearty pardon."

"I was too hot, Sire," confessed Berenger, with one of his ingenuous blushes, "but he enraged me."

"He means mischief," said Henry. "Remember, if you are molested respecting this matter, that you have here a witness that you did the part of a gentleman."

Berenger bowed his thanks, and began something about the honour, but his eye anxiously followed the circuit on which Eustacie was carried, and the glance was quickly remarked.

"How? Your heart is spinning in that Mahometan paradise, and that is what put such force into your fists. Which of the houris is it? The little one with the wistful eyes, who looked so deadly white and shrieked out when the devilry overturned you? Eh! Monsieur, you are a happy man."

"I should be, Sire;" and Berenger was on the point of confiding the situation of his affairs to this most engaging of princes, when a fresh supply of prisoners, chased with wild antics and fiendish yells by the devils, came headlong in on them.

This dance had been the special device of Monsieur and the ballet-master, and during the last three days the houris had been almost danced off their legs with rehearsing it morning, noon, and night, but one at least of them was scarcely in a condition for its performance. Eustacie, dizzied at the first minute by the whirl of her Elysian merry-go-round, had immediately after become conscious of that which she had been too childish to estimate merely in prospect, the exposure to universal gaze. Strange staring eyes, glaring light, frightful imps seemed to wheel round her in an intolerable delirious succession. Her only refuge was in closing her eyes, but even this could not long be persevered in, so necessary a part of the pageant was she; and besides, she had Berenger to look for, Berenger, whom she had foolishly laughed at for knowing how dreadful it would be. But of course the endeavour to seek for one object with her eyes made the dizziness even more dreadful; and when, at length, she beheld him dragged down by the demoniacal creatures, whose horrors were magnified by her confused senses, and the next moment she was twirled out of sight, her cry of distracted alarm was irrepressible. Carried round again and again, on a wheel that to her was far more like Ixion's than that of the spheres, she never cleared her perceptions as to where he was, and only was half-maddened by the fantastic whirl of incongruous imagery, while she barely sat out Mercury's lengthy harangue; and when her wheel stood still, and she was released, she could not stand, and was indebted to Charon and one of her fellow nymphs for support-

ing her to a chair in the back of the scene. Kind Charon hurried to bring her wine, the lady revived her with essences, and the ballet-master clamoured for his performers.

Ill or well, royal ballets must be danced. One long sob, one gaze round at the refreshing sight of a room no longer in motion, one wistful look at the gates of Tartarus, and the misery of the throbbing, aching head must be disregarded. The ballet-master touched the white cheeks with rouge, and she stepped forward just in time, for Monsieur himself was coming angrily forward to learn the cause of the delay.

Spectators said the windings of that dance were exquisitely graceful. It was well that Eustacie's drilling had been so complete, for she moved through it blindly, senselessly, and when it was over was led back between the two Demoiselles de Limeuil to the apartment that served as a green-room, drooping and almost fainting. They seated her in a chair, and consulted round her, and her cousin Narcisse was among the first to approach; but no sooner had she caught sight of his devilish trim than with a little shriek she shut her eyes, and flung herself to the other side of the chair.

"My fair cousin," he said, opening his black vizard, "do you not see me? I am no demon, remember! I am your cousin."

"That makes it no better," said Eustacie, too much disordered and confused to be on her guard, and hiding her face with her hands. "Go, go, I entreat you."

"Nay, my fair one, I cannot leave you thus! Shall I send for my father to take you home?"

In fact he had already done this, and the ladies added their counsel; for indeed the poor child could scarcely hold up her head, but she said, "I should like

to stay, if I could: a little, a little longer. Will they not open those dreadful bars?" she added, presently.

"They are even now opening them," said Mlle. de Limeuil. "Hark! they are going to fight *en mêlée*. Mlle. de Nid-de-Merle is better now?"

"Oh yes; let me not detain you."

Eustacie would have risen, but the two sisters had fluttered back, impatient to lose nothing of the sports; and her cousin in his grim disguise stood full before her. "No haste, cousin," he said: "you are not fit to move."

"Oh, then go," said Eustacie, suffering too much not to be petulant. "You make me worse."

"And why? It was not always thus," began Narcisse, so eager to seize an opportunity as to have little consideration for her condition; but she was unable to bear any more, and broke out: "Yes, it was; I always detested you. I detest you more than ever, since you deceived me so cruelly. Oh, do but leave me!"

"You scorn me, then! You prefer to me—who have loved you so long—that childish new-comer, who was ready enough to cast you off."

"Prefer! He is my husband! It is an insult for any one else to speak to me thus!" said Eustacie, drawing herself up, and rising to her feet; but she was forced to hold by the back of her chair, and Diane and her father appearing at that moment, she tottered towards the former, and becoming quite passive under the influence of violent dizziness and headache, made no objection to being half led, half carried, through galleries that connected the Hôtel de Bourbon with the Louvre.

And thus it was that when Berenger had fought out his part in the *mêlée* of the prisoners released, and had maintained the honours of the rose-coloured token in his helmet, he found that his lady-love had been obliged

by indisposition to return home; and while he stood, folding his arms to restrain their strong inclination to take Narcisse by the throat and demand whether this were another of his deceptions, a train of fireworks suddenly exploded in the middle of the Styx—a last surprise, especially contrived by King Charles, and so effectual that half the ladies were shrieking, and imagining that they and the whole hall had blown up together.

A long supper, full of revelry, succeeded, and at length Sidney and Ribaumont walked home together in the midst of their armed servants bearing torches. All the way home Berenger was bitter in vituperation of the hateful pageant and all its details.

“Yea, truly,” replied Sidney; “methought that it betokens disease in the mind of a nation when their festive revelry is thus ghastly, rendering the most awful secrets made known by our God in order to warn man from sin into a mere antic laughing-stock. Laughter should be moved by what is fair and laughter-worthy—even like such sports as our own ‘Midsummer Night’s Dream.’ I have read that the bloody temper of Rome fed itself in gladiator shows, and verily, what we beheld to-night betokens something at once grisly and light-minded in the mood of this country.”

Sidney thought so the more when on the second ensuing morning the Admiral de Coligny was shot through both hands by an assassin generally known to have been posted by the Duke of Guise, yet often called by the sinister sobriquet of *Le Tueur du Roi*.

CHAPTER XI

THE KING'S TRAGEDY

"The night is come, no fears disturb
The sleep of innocence,
They trust in kingly faith, and kingly oath.
They sleep, alas! they sleep.
Go to the palace, wouldst thou know
How hideous night can be;
Eye is not closed in those accursed walls,
Nor heart is quiet there!"

SOUTHEY, *Bartholomew's Eve*.

"**Y**OUNG gentlemen," said Sir Francis Walsingham, as he rose from dinner on the Saturday, "are you bound for the palace this evening?"

"I am, so please your Excellency," returned Berenger.

"I would have you both to understand that you must have a care of yourselves," said the Ambassador. "The Admiral's wound has justly caused much alarm, and I hear that the Protestants are going vapouring about in so noisy and incautious a manner, crying out for justice, that it is but too likely that the party of the Queen-mother and the Guises will be moved to strong measures."

"They will never dare lay a finger upon us!" said Sidney.

"In a terror-stricken fray men are no respecters of persons," replied Sir Francis. "This house is, of course, inviolable; and, whatever the madness of the people, we have stout hearts enough here to enforce

respect thereto; but I cannot answer even for an Englishman's life beyond its precincts; and you, Ribau-mont, whom I cannot even claim as my Queen's subject—I greatly fear to trust you beyond its bounds."

"I cannot help it, Sir. Nay, with the most grateful thanks for all your goodness to me, I must pray you not to take either alarm or offense if I return not this night."

"No more, my friend," said Walsingham, quickly; "let me know nothing of your purposes, but take care of yourself. I would you were safe at home again, though the desire may seem inhospitable. The sooner the better with whatever you have to do."

"Is the danger so imminent?" asked Sidney.

"I know nothing, Philip. All I can tell is that, as I have read that dogs and cattle scent an earthquake in the air, so men and women seem to breathe a sense of danger in this city. And to me the graciousness with which the Huguenots have been of late treated wears a strangely suspicious air. Sudden and secret is the blow like to be, and we cannot be too much on our guard. Therefore remember, my young friends both, that your danger or death would fall heavily on those ye love and honour at home."

So saying, he left the two youths, unwilling to seek further confidence, and Berenger held his last consultation with Sidney, to whom he gave directions for making full explanation to Walsingham in his absence, and expediting Mr. Adderley's return to England. Osbert alone was to go to the Louvre with him, after having seen the five English grooms on board the little decked market-vessel on the Seine, which was to await the fugitives. Berenger was to present himself in the palace as in his ordinary Court attendance, and, contriving to elude notice among the throng who were there lodged, was to take up his station at the foot of

the stairs leading to the apartments of the ladies, whence Eustacie was to descend at about eleven o'clock, with her maid Véronique. Landry Osbert was to join them from the lackey's hall below, where he had a friend, and the connivance of the porter at the postern opening towards the Seine had been secured.

Sidney wished much to accompany him to the palace, if his presence could be any aid or protection, but on consideration it was decided that his being at the Louvre was likely to attract notice to Ribaumont's delaying there. The two young men therefore shook hands and parted, as youths who trusted that they had begun a lifelong friendship, with mutual promises to write to one another—the one, the adventures of his flight; the other, the astonishment it would excite. And auguries were exchanged of merry meetings in London, and of the admiration the lovely little wife would excite at Queen Elizabeth's court.

Then, with an embrace such as English friends then gave, they separated at the gate; and Sidney stood watching, as Berenger walked free and bold down the street, his sword at his side, his cloak over one shoulder, his feathered cap on one side, showing his bright curling hair, a sunshiny picture of a victorious bridegroom—such a picture as sent Philip Sidney's wits back to Arcadia.

It was not a day of special state, but the palace was greatly crowded. The Huguenots were in an excited mood, inclined to rally round Henry of Navarre, whose royal title made him be looked on as in a manner their monarch, though his kingdom had been swallowed by Spain, and he was no more than a French Duke distantly related to royalty in the male line, and more nearly through his grandmother and bride. The eight hundred gentlemen he had brought with him swarmed about his apartments, making their lodging on stair-

cases and in passages; and to Berenger it seemed as if the King's guards and Monsieur's gentlemen must have come in in equal numbers to balance them. Narcisse was there, and Berenger kept cautiously amid his Huguenot acquaintances, resolved not to have a quarrel thrust on him which he could not honorably desert. It was late before he could work his way to the young Queen's reception-room, where he found Eustacie. She looked almost as white as at the masque; but there was a graver, less childish expression in her face than he had ever seen before, and her eyes glanced confidence when they met his.

Behind the Queen's chair a few words could be spoken.

"*Ma mie*, art thou well again? Canst bear this journey now?"

"Quite well, now! quite ready. Oh that we may never have masques in England!"

He smiled—"Never such as this!"

"Ah! thou knowest best. I am glad I am thine already; I am so silly, thou wouldest never have chosen me! But thou wilt teach me, and I will strive to be very good! And oh! let me but give one farewell to Diane."

"It is too hard to deny thee aught to-night, sweet-heart, but judge for thyself. Think of the perils, and decide."

Before Eustacie could answer, a rough voice came near, the King making noisy sport with the Count de Rochefoucauld and others. He was louder and ruder than Berenger had ever yet seen him, almost giving the notion of intoxication; but neither he nor his brother Henry ever tasted wine, though both had a strange pleasure in being present at the orgies of their companions: the King, it was generally said, from love of the self-forgetfulness of excitement—the Duke of

Anjou, because his cool brain there collected men's secrets to serve afterwards for his spiteful diversion.

Berenger would willingly have escaped notice, but his bright face and sunny hair always make him conspicuous, and the King suddenly strode up to him, "You here, sir! I thought you would have managed your affairs so as to be gone long ago!" then before Berenger could reply, "However, since here you are, come along with me to my bedchamber! We are to have a carouse there to-night that will ring through all Paris! Yes, and shake Rochefoucauld out of his bed at midnight! You will be one of us, Ribaumont? I command it!"

And without waiting for reply he turned away with an arm around Rochefoucauld's neck, and boisterously addressed another of the company, almost as wildly as if he were in the mood that Scots call "fey."

"Royalty seems determined to frustrate our plans," said Berenger, as soon as the King was out of hearing.

"But you will not go! His comrades drink till—oh! two, three in the morning. We should never get away."

"No, I must risk his displeasure. We shall soon be beyond his reach. But at least I may make his invitation a reason for remaining in the Louvre. People are departing! Soon wilt thou be my own."

"As soon as the Queen's *coucher* is over! I have but to change to a travelling dress."

"At the foot of the winding stair. Sweetest, be brave!"

"I fear nothing with thee to guard me. See, the Queen is rising."

Elisabeth was in effect rising to make her respectful progress to the rooms of the Queen-mother, to bid her good-night; and Eustacie must follow. Would Diane be there? Oh that the command to judge between

her heart and her caution had not been given! Cruel kindness!

Diane was there, straight as a poplar, cold as marble, with fixed eyes. Eustacie stole up to her, and touched her. She turned with a start. "Cousin, you have been very good to me!" Diane started again, as if stung. "You will love me still, whatever you hear?"

"Is this meant for farewell?" said Diane, grasping her wrist.

"Do not ask me, Diane. I may not."

"Where there is no trust there is no treason," said Diane, dreamily. "No, answer me not, little one, there will be time for that another day. Where is he?"

"In the *oeil-de-boeuf*, between the King's and Queen's suites of rooms. I must go. There is the Queen going. Diane, one loving word."

"Silly child, you shall have plenty another time," said Diane, breaking away. "Follow thy Queen now!"

Catherine, who sat between her daughters Claude and Marguerite, looked pre-occupied, and summarily dismissed her daughter-in-law, Elisabeth, whom Eustacie was obliged to follow to her own state-room. There all the forms of the *coucher* were tediously gone through; every pin had its own ceremony, and even when her Majesty was safely deposited under her blue satin coverlet the ladies still stood round till she felt disposed to fall asleep. Elisabeth was both a sleepy and a considerate person, so that this was not so protracted a vigil as was sometimes exacted by the more wakeful princesses; but Eustacie could not escape from it till it was already almost midnight, the period for her tryst.

Her heart was very full. It was not the usual flutter and terror of an eloping girl. Eustacie was a fearless little being, and her conscience had no alarms;

her affections were wholly with Berenger, and her transient glimpses of him had been as of something come out of a region higher, tenderer, stronger, purer, more trustworthy than that where she had dwelt. She was proud of belonging to him. She had felt upheld by the consciousness through years of waiting, and now he more than realized her hopes, and she could have wept for exulting joy.

Eustacie's cell was nearly at the end of the gallery, and, exchanging "good-nights" with her companions, she proceeded to her recess, where she expected to find Véronique ready to adjust her dress. Véronique, however, was missing; but anxious to lose no time, she had taken off her delicate white satin farthingale to change it for an unobtrusive dark woollen kirtle, when, to her surprise and dismay, a loud creaking, growling sound made itself heard outside the door at the other end. Half-a-dozen heads came out of their cells; half-a-dozen voices asked and answered the question, "What is it?" "They are bolting our door outside." But only Eustacie sped like lightning along the passage, pulled at the door, and cried, "Open! Open, I say!" No answer, but the other bolt creaked.

"You mistake, *concierge*! We are never bolted in! My maid is shut out."

No answer, but the step retreated. Eustacie clasped her hands with a cry that she could hardly have repressed, but which she regretted the next moment.

Gabrielle de Limeuil laughed. "What, Mademoiselle, are you afraid they will not let us out to-morrow?"

"My maid!" murmured Eustacie, recollecting that she must give a colour to her distress.

"Ah! perhaps she will summon old Pierre to open for us."

This suggestion somewhat consoled Eustacie, and

she stood intently listening for Véronique's step, wishing that her companions would hold their peace; but the adventure amused them, and they discussed whether it were a blunder of the *concierge*, or a piece of prudery of Madame la Comtesse, or, after all, a precaution. The palace so full of strange people, who could say what might happen? And there was a talk of a conspiracy of the Huguenots. At any rate, every one was too much frightened to go to sleep.

Eustacie, her cloak round her shoulders, stood with her back against the door, ready to profit by the slightest indication outside of a step that might lead to her release, or at least enable her to communicate with Véronique; longing ardently that her companions would go to bed, yet unable to avoid listening with the like dreadful fascination to each of the terrible histories, which added each moment to the nervous horror of the whole party. Only one, a dull and composed girl, felt the influence of weariness, and dozed with her head in her companion's lap; but she was awakened by one general shudder and suppressed cry when the hoarse clang of a bell struck on the ears of the already terrified, excited maidens.

"The tocsin! The bell of St. Germain! Fire! No, a Huguenot rising! Fire! Oh, let us out! Let us out! The window! Where is the fire? Nowhere! See the lights! Hark, that was a shot! It was in the palace! A heretic rising! Ah! there was to be a slaughter of the heretics! I heard it whispered. Oh, let us out! Open the door!"

But nobody heard: nobody opened. There was one who stood without word or cry, close to the door—her eyes dilated, her cheek colourless, her whole person, soul and body alike, concentrated in that one impulse to spring forward the first moment the bolt should be drawn. But still the door remained fast shut!



"SHE STOOD INTENTLY LISTENING FOR VERONIQUE'S STEP"

CHAPTER XII

THE PALACE OF SLAUGHTER

"A human shambles with blood-reeking floor."

MISS SWANWICK, *Æsch. Agamemnon*.

THE door was opened at last, but not till full daylight. It found Eustacie as ready to rush forth, past all resistance, as she had been the night before, and she was already in the doorway when her maid Véronique, her face swollen with weeping, caught her by the hands and implored her to turn back and listen.

And words about a rising of the Huguenots, a general destruction, corpses lying in the court—were already passing between the other maidens and the *concierge*. Eustacie turned upon her servant; "Véronique, what means it? Where is he?"

"Alas! alas! Ah! Mademoiselle, do but lie down! Woe is me! I saw it all! Lie down, and I will tell you."

"Tell! I will not move till you have told me where my husband is," said Eustacie, gazing with eyes that seemed to Véronique turned to stone.

"Ah! my lady—my dear lady! I was on the turn of the stairs, and saw all. The traitor—the Chevalier Narcisse—came on him, cloaked like you—and—shot him dead—with, oh, such cruel words of mockery! Oh! woe the day! Stay, stay, dear lady, the place is all blood—they are slaying them all—all the Huguenots! Will no one stop her?—Mademoiselle—ma'm'selle!—"

For Eustacie no sooner gathered the sense of Véronique's words than she darted suddenly forwards, and was in a few seconds more at the foot of the stairs. There, indeed, lay a pool of dark gore, and almost in it Berenger's black velvet cap, with the heron plume. Eustacie, with a low cry, snatched it up, continued her headlong course along the corridor, swiftly as a bird, Véronique following, and vainly shrieking to her to stop. Diane, appearing at the other end of the gallery, saw but for a moment the little figure, with the cloak gathered round her neck, and floating behind her, understood Véronique's cry and joined in the chase across hall and gallery, where more stains were to be seen, even down to the marble stairs, every step slippery with blood. Others there were who saw and stood aghast, not understanding the apparition that flitted on so swiftly, never pausing till at the great door at the foot of the stairs she encountered a gigantic Scottish archer, armed to the teeth. She touched his arm, and standing with folded arms, looked up and said, "Good soldier, kill me! I am a Huguenot!"

"Stop her! bring her back!" cried Diane from behind. "It is Mlle. de Nid-de-Merle!"

"No, no! My husband is Huguenot! I am a Huguenot! Let them kill me, I say!"—struggling with Diane, who had now come up with her, and was trying to draw her back.

"Puir lassie!" muttered the stout Scotsman to himself, "this fearsome night has driven her demented."

But, like a true sentinel, he moved neither hand nor foot to interfere, as shaking herself loose from Diane, she was springing down the steps into the court, when at that moment the young Abbé de Méricour was seen advancing, pale, breathless, horror-struck, and to him Diane shrieked to arrest the headlong course. He

obeyed, seeing the wild distraction of the white face and widely glaring eyes, took her by both hands, and held her in a firm grasp, saying, "Alas, lady, you cannot go out. It is no sight for any one."

"They are killing the Protestants," she said; "I am one! Let me find them and die."

A strong effort to free herself ensued, but it was so suddenly succeeded by a swoon that the Abbé could scarcely save her from dropping on the steps. Diane begged him to carry her in, since they were in full view of men-at-arms in the court, and, frightful to say, of some of the ladies of the palace, who, in the frenzy of that dreadful time, had actually come down to examine the half-stripped corpses of the men with whom they had jested not twelve hours before.

"Ah! it is no wonder," said the youthful Abbé, as he tenderly lifted the inanimate figure. "This has been a night of horrors. I was coming in haste to know whether the King knows of this frightful plot of M. de Guise, and the bloody work that is passing in Paris."

"The King!" exclaimed Diane, "M. l'Abbé, do you know where he is now? In the balcony overlooking the river, taking aim at the fugitives! Take care! Even your *soutane* would not save you if M. d'O and his crew heard you. But I must pray you to aid me with this poor child! I dread that her wild cries should be heard."

The Abbé, struck dumb with horror, silently obeyed Mlle. de Ribeaumont, and brought the still insensible Eustacie to the chamber, now deserted by all the young ladies. He laid her on her bed, and finding he could do no more, left her to her cousin and her maid.

The poor child had been unwell and feverish ever since the masque, and the suspense of these few days with the tension of that horrible night had prostrated

her. She only awoke from her swoon to turn her head from the light and refuse to be spoken to.

Although she had been totally prostrated by her recent experiences Eustacie rallied so much that about ten days after the dreadful St. Bartholomew, in the early morning, she was half-led half-carried down the stairs between her uncle and Véronique. Her face was close muffled in her thick black veil, but when she came to the foot of the first stairs where she had found Berenger's cap, a terrible shuddering came on her; she again murmured something about the smell of blood, and fell into a swoon.

"Carry her on at once," said Diane, who was following—"there will be no end to it if you do not remove her immediately."

And thus shielded from the sight of Narcisse's intended passionate gesture of farewell at the palace-door, Eustacie was laid at full length on the seat of the great ponderous family coach, where Véronique hardly wished to revive her till the eight horses should have dragged her beyond the streets of Paris, with their terrible associations, and the gibbets still hung with the limbs of the murdered.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BRIDEGROOM'S ARRIVAL

"The starling flew to his mother's window stane,
It whistled and it sang,
And aye, the ower word of the tune
Was 'Johnnie tarries lang.'"

Johnnie of Bredislee.

SIR MARMADUKE'S butler slowly entered the hall, and approached him cautiously. "Can I speak with you, sir?"

"What is it, Davy?" demanded the lady, who first caught the words. "What did you say?"

"Madam, it is Humfrey Holt!"

Humfrey Holt was the head of the grooms who had gone with Berenger; and there was a general start and suppressed exclamation. "Humfrey Holt!" said Lord Walwyn, feebly drawing himself to sit upright, "hath he, then, escaped?"

"Yea, my Lord," said Davy, "and he brings news of my young Lord."

"Alack! Davy," said Lady Walwyn, "such news had been precious a while ago."

"Nay, so please your Ladyship, it is better than you deem. Humfrey says my young Lord is yet living."

"Living!" shrieked Lady Thistlewood, starting up. "Living! My son! and where?"

"They are bearing him home, my Lady," said the butler; "but I fear me, by what Humfrey says, that it is but in woful case."

"Bringing him home! Which way?" Philip darted off like an arrow from the bow. Sir Marmaduke hastily demanded if aid were wanted; and Lady Walwyn, interpreting the almost inaudible voice of her husband, bade that Humfrey should be called in to tell his own story.

Hands were held out in greeting, and blessings murmured, as the groom entered, looking battered and worn, and bowing low in confusion at being thus unusually conspicuous, and having to tell his story to the whole assembled family. To the first anxious question as to the condition of the young Lord, he replied, "Marry, my Lady, the life is yet in him, and that is all. He hath been shot through the head and body, and slashed about the face so as it is a shame to see. Nor hath he done aught these three weary weeks but moan from time to time so as it is enough to break one's heart to hear him; and I fear me 'tis but bringing him home to die."

"Even so, God be thanked; and you, too, honest Humfrey," said Lady Walwyn. "Let us hear when and how this deed was done."

"Why, that, my Lord, I can't so well say, being that I was not with him; more's the pity, or I'd have known the reason why, or ever they laid a finger on him. But when Master Landry, his French foster-brother, comes, he will resolve you in his own tongue. I can't parley-voo with him, but he's an honest rogue for a Frenchman, and 'twas he brought off my young Lord. You see we were all told to be aboard the little French craft. Master Landry took me down and settled it all with the master, a French farmer fellow that came a horse-dealing to Paris. I knew what my young Lord was after, but none of the other varlets did; and I went down and made as decent a place as I could between decks. My Lord and Master Landry were gone

down to the Court meantime, and we were to lie off till we heard a whistle like a mavis on the bank, then come and take them aboard. Well, we waited and waited, and all the lights were out, and not a sound did we hear till just an hour after midnight. Then a big bell rang out, not like a decent Christianable bell, but a great clash, then another, and a lot of strokes enough to take away one's breath. Then half the windows were lighted up, and we heard shots, and screeches, and splashes, till, as I said to Jack Smithers, 'twas as if one-half the place was murdering the other. The farmer got frightened, and would have been off; but when I saw what he was at, 'No,' says I, 'not an inch do we budge without news of my Lord.' So Jack stood by the rope, and let them see that 'twas as much as their life was worth to try to unmoor. Mercy, what a night it was! Shrieks and shouts, and shots and howls, here, there, and everywhere, and splashes into the river; and by and by we saw the poor murdered creatures come floating by. The farmer, he had some words with one of the boats near, and I heard somewhat of Huguenot and Hereteek, and I knew that was what they called good Protestants. Then up comes the farmer with his sons looking mighty ugly at us, and signing that unless we let them be off 'twould be the worse for us; and we began to think as how we had best be set ashore, and go down the five of us to see if we could stand by my young Lord in some strait, or give notice to my Lord Ambassador."

"God reward you!" exclaimed Lady Walwyn.

"'Twas only our duty, my Lady," gruffly answered Humfrey; but just as Hal had got on the quay, what should I see but Master Landry coming down the street with my young Lord on his back! I can tell you he was well-nigh spent; and just then half a dozen butcherly villains came out on him, bawling, 'Tu-y!

tu-y' which it seems means 'kill, kill.' He turned about and showed them that he had got a white sleeve and white cross in his bonnet, like them, the rascals, giving them to understand that he was only going to throw the corpse into the river. I doubted him then myself; but he caught sight of us, and in his fashion of talk with us, called out to us to help, for there was life still. So two of us took my Lord, and the other three gave the beggarly French cut-throats as good as they meant for us; while Landry shouted to the farmer to wait, and we got aboard, and made right away down the river. But never a word has the poor young gentleman spoken, though Master Landry has done all a barber or a sick-nurse could do; and he got us past the cities by showing the papers in my Lord's pocket, so that we got safe to the farmer's place. There we lay till we could get a boat to Jersey, and thence again home; and maybe my young Lord will mend now Mistress Cecily will have the handling of him."

"That is in the wisest Hands, good Humfrey," said Lord Walwyn, as the tears of feeble age flowed down his cheeks. "May He who hath brought the lad safely so far spare him yet, and raise him up. But whether he live or die, you son and daughter Thistlewood will look that the faithfulness of Humfrey Holt and his comrades be never forgotten or unrewarded."

Humfrey again muttered something about no more than his duty; but by this time sounds were heard betokening the approach of the melancholy procession, who, having been relieved by a relay of servants sent at once from the house, were bearing home the wounded youth. Philip first of all dashed in hurrying and stumbling. He had been unprepared by hearing Humfrey's account, and, impetuous and affectionate as he was, was entirely unrestrained, and flinging himself

on his knees with the half-audible words, "Oh! Lucy! Lucy! he is as good as dead!" hid his face between his arms on his sister's lap, and sobbed with the abandonment of a child, and with all his youthful strength; so much adding to the consternation and confusion, that, finding all Lucy's gentle entreaties vain, his father at last roughly pulled up his face by main force, and said, "Philip, hold your tongue! Are we to have you on our hands as well as my Lady? I shall send you home this moment! Let your sister go."

This threat reduced the boy to silence. Lucy, who was wanted to assist in preparing Berenger's room, disengaged herself; but he remained in the same posture, his head buried on the seat of the chair, and the loud weeping only forcibly stifled by forcing his handkerchief into his mouth, as if he had been in violent bodily pain. Nor did he venture again to look up as the cause of all his distress was slowly carried into the hall, corpse-like indeed. The bearers had changed several times, all but a tall, fair Norman youth, who through the whole transit had supported the head, endeavouring to guard it from shocks. When the mother and the rest came forward, he made a gesture to conceal the face, saying in French, "Ah! mesdames; this is no sight for you."

Indeed the head and face were almost entirely hidden by bandages, and it was not till Berenger had been safely deposited on a large carved bed that the anxious relatives were permitted to perceive the number and extent of his hurts; and truly it was only by the breath, the vital warmth, and the heavy moans when he was disturbed, or the dressings of the wounds were touched, that showed him still to be a living man. There proved to be no less than four wounds—a shot through the right shoulder, the right arm also broken with a terrible blow with a sword, a broad gash from

the left temple to the right ear, and worse than all, "*le baiser d'Eustacie*," a bullet-wound where the muzzle of the pistol had absolutely been so close as to have burnt and blackened the cheek; so that his life was, as Osbert averred, chiefly owing to the assassin's jealousy of his personal beauty, which had directed his shot to the cheek rather than the head; and thus, though the bullet had terribly shattered the upper jaw and roof of the mouth, and had passed out through the back of the head, there was a hope that it had not penetrated the seat of life or reason. The other gash on the face was but a sword-wound, and though frightful to look at, was unimportant, compared with the first wound with the pistol-shot in the shoulder, with the arm broken and further injured by having served to suspend him round Osbert's neck; but it was altogether so appalling a sight, that it was no wonder that Sir Marmaduke muttered low but deep curses on the cowardly ruffians; while his wife wept in grief as violent, though more silent, than her stepson's, and only Cecily gathered the faintest ray of hope. The wounds had been well cared for, the arm had been set, the hair cut away, and lint and bandages applied with a skill that surprised her, till she remembered that Landry Osbert had been bred up in preparation to be Berenger's valet, and thus to practise those minor arts of surgery then required in a superior body-servant. For his part, though his eyes looked red, and his whole person exhausted by unceasing watching, he seemed unable to relinquish the care of his master for a moment, and her nunnery French would not have persuaded him of her sufficiency as a nurse, had he not perceived her tender touch and ready skill. These were what made him consent to leave his post even for a short meal, and so soon as he had eaten it he was called to Lord Walwyn to supply the further ac-

count which Humfrey had been unable to give. He had waited, he explained, with a lackey, a friend of his in the palace, till he became alarmed by the influx of armed men, wearing white crosses and shirt-sleeves on their left arms, but his friend had assured him that his master had been summoned to the royal bed-chamber, where he would be as safe as in church; and obtaining from Landry Osbert himself a perfectly true assurance of being a good Catholic, had supplied him with the badges that were needful for security. It was just then that Madame's maid crept down to his waiting place with the intelligence that her mistress had been bolted in, and after a short consultation they agreed to go and see whether M. le Baron were indeed waiting, and, if he were, to warn him of the suspicious state of the lower regions of the palace.

They were just in time to see, but not to prevent the attack upon their young master; and while Véronique fled, screaming, Landry Osbert, who had been thrown back on the stairs in her sudden flight, recovered himself and hastened to his master. The murderers, after their blows had been struck, had hurried along the corridor to join the body of assassins, whose work they had in effect somewhat anticipated. Landry, full of rage and despair, was resolved at least to save his foster-brother's corpse from further insult, and bore it downstairs in his arms. On the way, he perceived that life was not yet extinct, and resolving to become doubly cautious, he sought in the pocket for the purse that had been well filled for the flight, and by the persuasive argument of gold crowns, obtained egress from the doorkeeper of the postern, where Berenger hoped to have emerged in a far different manner. It was a favourable moment, for the main body of the murderers were at that time being posted in the court by the captain of the guard, ready to mas-

sacre the gentlemen of the King of Navarre's suite, and he was therefore unmolested by any claimant of the plunder of the apparent corpse he bore on his shoulders. The citizens of Paris who had been engaged in their share of the murders for more than an hour before the tragedy began in the Louvre, frequently beset him on his way to the quay, and but for the timely aid of his English comrades, he would hardly have brought off his foster-brother safely.

The pass with which King Charles had provided Berenger for himself and his followers when his elopement was first planned, enabled Osbert to carry his whole crew safely past all the stations where passports were demanded. He had much wished to procure surgical aid at Rouen, but learning from the boatmen on the river that the like bloody scenes were there being enacted, he had decided on going on to his master's English home as soon as possible, merely trusting to his own skill by the way; and though it was the slightest possible hope, yet the healthy state of the wounds, and the mere fact of life continuing, had given him some faint trust that there might be a partial recovery.

Lord Walwyn repeated his agitated thanks and praises for such devotion to his grandson.

Osbert bowed, laid his hand on his heart, and replied—"Monseigneur is good, but what say I? Monsieur le Baron is my foster-brother! Say that, and all is said in one word."

He was then dismissed, with orders to take some rest, but he obstinately refused all commands in French or English to go to bed, and was found some time after fast asleep.

CHAPTER XIV.

SWEET HEART

"Ye hae marred a bonnier face than your ain."

Dying words of the Bonnie Earl of Moray.

AFTER he regained consciousness, Berenger never rested till he had made Osbert, Mr. Adderley, and Cecily tell him all they knew, and asked by name after those whom he had known best at Paris. Alas! of all those, save such as had been in the Ambassador's house, there was but one account to give. Venerable warrior, noble-hearted youth, devoted pastor, all alike had perished!

This frightful part of the story was altogether new to him. He had been probably the earliest victim in the Louvre, as being the special object of private malice, which had contrived to involve him in the general catastrophe; and his own recollections carried him only to the flitting of lights and ringing of bells, that had made him imagine that an alarm of fire would afford a good opportunity of escape if *she* would but come. A cloaked figure had approached—he had held out his arms—met that deadly stroke—heard the words hissed in his ear.

He owned that for some time past strange recollections had been flitting through his mind—a perpetual unsatisfied longing for and expectation of his wife, and confused impressions of scenes and people that harassed him perpetually, even when he could not discern between dreams and reality; but knowing that he

had been very ill, he had endeavoured to account for everything as delirious fancies, but had become increasingly distressed by their vividness, confusion, and want of outward confirmation. At last these solid tokens and pledges from that time had brought certainty back, and with it the harmony and clearness of his memory: and the strong affection, that even the oblivion had not extinguished, now recurred in all its warmth to its object.

Four months had passed, as he now discovered, since that night when he had hoped to have met Eustacie, and she must be believing him dead. His first measure on the following day when he had been dressed and seated in his chair was to send for his casket, and with his slow stiff arm write thus:—

"MON COEUR, MY OWN SWEETHEART—Hast thou thought me dead, and thyself deserted? Osbert will tell thee all, and why I can scarce write. Trust thyself to him to bring to me. I shall be whole seeing thee. Or if thou canst not come with him, write or send me the least token by him, and I will come and bear thee home so soon as I can put foot in stirrup. Would that I could write all that is in my heart!

"THY HUSBAND."

It was all that either head or hand would enable him to say, but he had the fullest confidence in Landry Osbert, who was one of the few who understood him at half a word. He desired Osbert to seek the lady out wherever she might be, whether still at court or in a convent, convey the letter to her if possible, and, if she could by any means escape, obtain from Château Leurre such an escort as she could come to England with. If, as was too much to be feared, she was under too close restraint, Osbert should send intelligence home, as he could readily do through the Ambassador's household, and Berenger trusted by that time to be able to take measures for claiming her in person.

Osbert readily undertook everything, but supplies for his journey were needed, and there was an absolute commotion in the house when it was known that Berenger had been writing to his faithless spouse, and wishing to send for her.

On a cold March day, a booted and spurred courier (not Osbert) entered by the gates of the courtyard.

He sprang up, and faster than he had yet attempted to move, met the man in the hall, and demanded the packet. It was a large one, done up in canvas, and addressed to the Right Honourable and Worshipful Sir William, Baron Walwyn of Hurst Walwyn, and he had further to endure the delay of carrying it to his grandfather's library, which he entered with far less delay and ceremony than was his wont. "Sit down, Berenger," said the old man, while addressing himself to the fastenings; and the permission was needed, for he could hardly have stood another minute. The covering contained a letter to Lord Walwyn himself, and a packet addressed to the Baron de Ribaumont, which his trembling fingers could scarcely succeed in cutting and tearing open.

It contained an ill written and spelt letter, running somewhat thus—

"MONSEIGNEUR—Your faithful servant hopes that Monsieur le Baron will forgive him for not returning, since I have been assured by good priests that it is not possible to save my soul in a country of heretics. I have done everything as Monsieur commanded, I have gone down into Anjou, and have had the honour to see the young lady to whom Monsieur le Baron charged me with a commission, and I delivered to her his letter, whereupon the lady replied that she thanked M. le Baron for the honour he had done her, but that being on the point of marriage to M. le Marquis de Nid-de-Merle, she did not deem it fitting to write to him, nor had she any tokens to send him, save what he had received on the St. Barthélemy midnight; they might further his suit elsewhere. These, Monsieur, were her words, and she laughed as she said them, so gaily that I thought her fairer than ever. I have prevailed with her to take me into her service as

intendant of the Château de Nid-de-Merle, knowing as she does, my fidelity to the name of Ribaumont. And so, trusting Monseigneur will pardon me for what I do solely for the good of my soul, I will ever pray for his welfare, and remain,

"His faithful menial and valet,

"LANDRY OSBERT."

The result was only what Lord Walwyn had anticipated, but he was nevertheless shocked at the crushing weight of the blow. His heart was full of compassion for the youth so cruelly treated in these his first years of life, and as much torn in his affections as mangled in person. After a pause, while he gathered up the sense of the letters, he laid his hand kindly on his grandson's arm, and said, "This is a woful budget, my poor son; we will do our best to help you to bear it."

"The only way to bear it," said Berenger, lifting up his face, "is for me to take horse and make for Anjou instantly. She will hold out bravely, and I may yet save her."

"Madness," said his grandfather; "you have then not read your fellow's letter?"

"I read no letter from fellow of mine. Yonder is a vile forgery. Narcisse's own, most likely. No one else would have so profaned her as to put such words into her mouth! My dear faithful foster-brother—have they murdered him?"

"Can you point to any proof that it is forged?" said Lord Walwyn, aware that handwriting was too difficult an art, and far too crabbed, among persons of Osbert's class, for there to be any individuality of penmanship.

"It is all forged," said Berenger. "It is as false that she could frame such a message as that poor Osbert would leave me."

"These priests have much power over the con-

science," began Lord Walwyn; but Berenger, interrupting his grandfather for the first time in his life, cried, "No priest could change her whole nature. Oh! my wife! my darling! what may they not be inflicting on her now! Sir, I must go. She may be saved! The deadly sin may be prevented!"

"This is mere raving, Berenger," said Lord Walwyn, not catching half what he said, and understanding little more than his resolution to hasten in quest of the lady. "You, who have not mounted a horse, nor walked across the pleasaunce yet!"

"My limbs should serve me to rescue her, or they are worth nothing to me."

Lord Walwyn would have argued that he need not regret his incapacity to move, since it was no doubt already too late, but Berenger burst forth—"She will resist; she will resist to the utmost, even if she deems me dead. Tortures will not shake her when she knows I live. I must prepare." And he started to his feet.

"Grandson," said Lord Walwyn, laying a hand on his arm, "listen to me. You are in no state to judge for yourself. I therefore command you to desist from this mad purpose."

He spoke gravely, but Berenger was disobedient for the first time. "My Lord," he said, "you are but my grandfather. She is my wife. My duty is to her."

He had plucked his sleeve away and was gone, before Lord Walwyn had been able to reason with him that there was no wife in the case, a conclusion at which the old statesman would not have arrived had he known of the ceremony at Montpipeau, and all that had there passed; but not only did Berenger deem himself bound to respect the King's secret, but conversation was so difficult to him that he had told very little of his adventures, and less to Lord Walwyn than any

one else. In effect, his grandfather considered this resolution of going to France as mere frenzy, and so it almost was, not only on the score of health and danger, but because as a ward, he was still so entirely under subjection, that his journey could have been hindered by absolutely forcible detention; and to this Lord Walwyn intended to resort, unless the poor youth either came to a more rational mind, or became absolutely unable to travel.

The last—as he had apprehended—came to pass only too surely. The very attempt to argue, and to defend Eustacie was too much for the injured head; and long before night Berenger fully believed himself on the journey, acted over its incidents, and struggled wildly with difficulties, all the time lying on his bed, with the old servants holding him down, and Cecily listening tearfully to his ravings.

For weeks longer he was to lie there in greater danger than ever. He only seemed soothed into quiet when Cecily chanted those old Latin hymns of her Benedictine rule, and then—when he could speak at all—he showed himself to be in imagination praying in Eustacie's convent chapel, sure to speak to her when the service should be over.

CHAPTER XV

THE MOONBEAM

"She wandered east, she wandered west,
She wandered out and in;
And at last into the very swine's stythe
The queen brought forth a son."

FAUSE FOODRAGE.

SUNDAY, in the old refectory at Bellaise, in the late afternoon, a few Huguenots, warned by messages from the farm, met to profit by one of their scanty secret opportunities for public worship. The hum of the prayer, and discourse of the pastor, rose up through the broken vaulting to Eustacie, still lying on her bed. She had been much shaken by the fatigue of her hasty flight hither, and bitterly grieved, too, by a message which Nanon, the nurse, conveyed to her, that poor Martin was in no state to come for her the next day. Both he and his wife had been seized upon by Narcisse and his men, and so savagely beaten in order to force from them a confession of her hiding-place, that both were lying helpless on their bed; and could only send an entreaty by the trust-worthy fool, that Rotrou would find means of conveying Madame into Chollet in some cart of hay or corn, in which she could be taken past the barriers.

But this was not to be. Good Nanon had sacrificed the sermon to creep up to Eustacie, and when the congregation were dispersing in the dusk, she stole down the stairs to her husband; and a few seconds

after he was hurrying as fast as *détours* would allow him to Blaise's farm. An hour and a half later, Dame Perrine, closely blindfolded for the last mile, was dragged up the spiral staircase, and ere the bandage was removed heard Eustacie's voice, with a certain cheeriness, say, "Oh! nurse; my son will soon come!"

The full moon gave her light, and the woman durst not have any other, save from the wood-fire that Nanon had cautiously lighted and screened. The moonshine was still supreme, when some time later a certain ominous silence and half-whisper between the two women at the hearth made Eustacie, with a low cry of terror, exclaim, "Nurse, nurse, what means this? Oh! He lives! I know he lives! Perrine, I command you tell me!"

"Living! Oh, yes, my love, my Lady," answered Perrine, returning towards her; "fair and perfect as the day. Be not disquieted for a moment."

"I will—I will disquiet myself," panted Eustacie, "unless you tell me what is amiss."

"Nothing amiss," said Nanon gruffly. "Madame will give thanks for this fair gift of a daughter."

It must be owned the words felt chill. She had never thought of this! It was as if the being for whom she had dared and suffered so much, in the trust that he would be Berenger's representative and avenger, had failed her and disappointed her. No defender, no paladin, no son to be proud of! Her heart and courage sank down in her weakness as they had never done before; and, without speaking, she turned her head away towards the darkness, feeling as if all had been for nothing, and she might as well sink away in her exhaustion. Mère Perrine was more angry with Nanon than conscious of her Lady's weakness. "Woman, you speak as if you knew not the blow to this family, and to all who hoped for better

days. What, that my Lady, the heiress, who ought to be in a bed of state, with velvet curtains, lace pillows, gold caudle-cups, should be here in a vile ruin, among owls and bats, like any beggar, and all for the sake, not of a young Lord to raise up the family, but of a miserable little girl! Had I known how it would turn out, I had never meddled in this mad scheme."

Before Nanon could express her indignation, Eustacie had turned her head, opened her eyes, and called out, "Miserable! Oh! what do you mean? Oh, is it true, Nanon? is it well with her?"

"As well as heart could wish," answered Nanon, cheerily. "Small, but a perfect little piece of sugar. There, Lady, she shall speak for herself."

And as Nanon laid the babe on the young mother's bosom, the thrilling touch at once put an end to all the repinings of the heiress, and awoke far other instincts.

"My child! my little one, my poor little orphan—all cruel to her! Oh, no welcome even from thy mother! Babe, babe, pardon me, I will make it up to thee; indeed I will! Oh! let me see her! Do not take her away, dear good woman, only hold her in the moonlight!"

The full rays of the moon, shining through the gable window, streamed down very near where Eustacie lay, and by a slight movement Dame Rotrou was able to render the little face as distinctly visible to her as if it had been daylight, save that the blanching light was somewhat embellishing to the new-born complexion, and increased that curious resemblance so often borne for the first few hours of life to the future self. Eustacie's cry at once was, "Himself, himself—his very face! Let me have her, my own moonbeam—his child—my joy!"

The tears, so long denied, rushed down like summer

rain as she clasped the child in her arms. Dame Perrine wandered to and fro, like one beside herself, not only at her Lady's wretched accommodations, but at the ill omens of the moonlight illumination, of the owls who snapped and hissed incessantly over the hay, and above all of the tears over the babe's face. She tried to remonstrate with Eustacie, but was answered only, "Let me weep! Oh, let me weep! It eases my heart! It cannot hurt my little one! She cannot weep for her father herself, so I must weep for her."

The weeping was gentle, not violent; and Dame Rotrou thought it did good rather than harm. She was chiefly anxious to be quit of Perrine, who, however faithful to the Lady of Ribaumont, must not be trusted to learn the way to this Huguenot asylum, and must be escorted back by Rotrou ere peep of dawn. The old woman knew that her own absence from home would be suspicious, and with many grumblings submitted; but first she took the child from Eustacie's reluctant arms, promising to restore her in a few moments, after finishing dressing her in the lace-edged swaddling bands so carefully preserved ever since Eustacie's own babyhood. In these moments she had taken them all by surprise by, without asking any questions, sprinkling the babe with water, and baptizing her by the hereditary name of Bérangère, the feminine of the only name Eustacie had always declared her son should bear. Such baptisms were not unfrequently performed by French nurses, but Eustacie exclaimed with a sound half dismay, half indignation.

Had the little Baronne de Ribaumont been lodged in a tapestried chamber, between curtains of velvet and gold, with a *beauiffet* by her side glistening with gold and silver plate, as would have befitted her station, instead of lying on a bed of straw, with no hang-

ings to the walls save cobwebs and hay, no curtains to her unglazed windows but dancing ivy-sprays and wall-flowers, no *beaufet* but the old rickety table, no attendants but Nanon and M. Gardon, no visitors but the two white owls, no provisions save the homely fare that rustic mothers lived upon—neither she nor her babe could have thriven better, and probably not half so well. She had been used to a hardy, out-of-door life, like the peasant women; and she was young and strong, so that she recovered as they did. If the April shower beat in at the window, or the hole in the roof, they made a screen of canvas, covered her with cloaks, and heaped them with hay, and she took no harm; and the pure open air that blew in was soft with all the southern sweetness of early spring-tide, and the little one throve in it like the puff-ball owlets in the hayloft, or the little ring-doves in the ivy, whose parent's cooing voice was Eustacie's favourite music. Almost as good as these her fellow-nestlings was the little Moonbeam, *la petite Rayonette*, as Eustacie fondly called this light that had come back to her from the sunshine she had lost. Had she cried or been heard, the sounds would probably have passed for the wailings of the ghostly victims of the Templars, but she exercised an exemplary forbearance in that respect, for which Eustacie thought she could not be sufficiently admired.

Like the child she was, Eustacie seemed to have put care from her, and to be solely taken up with the baby, and the amusement of watching the owl family.

There was a lull in the search at this moment, for the Chevalier had been recalled to Paris by the fatal illness of his son-in-law, M. de Selinville. The old soldier, after living half his life on bread and salad, that he might keep up a grand appearance at Paris, had, on coming into the wealth of the family, and

marrying a beautiful wife, returned to the luxuries he had been wont only to enjoy for a few weeks at a time, when in military occupation of some Italian town. Three months of festivities had been enough to cause his death; and the Chevalier was summoned to assist his daughter in providing for his obsequies, and in taking possession of the huge endowments which, as the last of his race, he had been able to bequeath to her. Such was the news brought by the old nurse Perrine, who took advantage of the slackening vigilance of the enemy to come to see Eustacie. The old woman was highly satisfied; for one of the peasants' wives had—as if on purpose to oblige her Lady—given birth to twins, one of whom had died almost immediately; and the parents had consented to conceal their loss, and at once take the little Demoiselle de Ribaumont as their own—guarding the secret till her mother should be able to claim her. It was so entirely the practice, under the most favourable circumstances, for French mothers to send their infants to be nursed in cottages, that Perrine was amazed by the cry of angry refusal that burst from Eustacie, “Part with my child! Leave her to her enemies!—never! never! Hold your tongue, Perrine! I will not hear of such a thing!”

“But, Madame, hear reason. She will pass for one of Simonette’s!”

“She shall pass for none but mine!—I part with thee, indeed! All that is left me of thy father!—the poor little orphaned innocent, that no one loves but her mother!”

“Madame—Mademoiselle, this is not common sense! Why, how can you hide yourself? how travel with a baby on your neck, whose crying may betray you!”

“She never cries—never, never! And better I were betrayed than she.”

"If it were a boy——" began Perrine.

"If it were a boy, there would be plenty to care for it. I should not care for it half so much. As for my poor little lonely girl, whom every one wishes away but her mother—ah! yes, baby, thy mother will go through fire and water for thee yet. Never fear, thou shalt not leave her!"

"No nurse can go with Madame. Simonette could not leave her home."

"What needs a nurse when she has me?"

"But, Madame," proceeded the old woman, out of patience, "you are beside yourself! What noble lady ever nursed her babe?"

"I don't care for noble ladies—I care for my child," said the vehement, petulant little thing.

"And how—what good will Madame's caring for it do? What knows she of infants? How can she take care of it?"

"Our Lady will teach me," said Eustacie, still pressing the child passionately to her heart; "and see—the owl—the ring-dove—can take care of their little ones; the good God shows them how—He will tell me how!"

Time passed, until one night, when Martin ventured over to the farm with a report so serious that Rotrou, at all risks, brought him up to communicate his own tidings. Some one had given information, Véronique he suspected, and the two Chevaliers were certainly coming the next day to search with fire the old buildings of the temple. It was already dawning towards morning, and it would be impossible to do more at present than to let Rotrou build up the Lady in a vault, some little way off, whence, after the search was over, she could be released, and join her vassals the next night according to the original design.

As to the child, her presence in the vault was impossible, and Martin had actually brought her intended

nurse, Simonette, to Rotrou's cottage to receive her.

"Never!" was all Eustacie answered. "Save both of us, or neither."

"Lady," said M. Gardon as she looked towards him, "I go my way with my staff.

"And you—you more faithful than her vassals—will let me take her?"

"Assuredly."

"Then, sir, even to the world's end will I go with you."

Martin would have argued, have asked, but she would not listen to him. It was Maître Gardon who made him understand the project. There was what in later times has been termed an underground railway amid the persecuted Calvinists, and M. Gardon knew his ground well enough to have little doubt of being able to conduct the lady safely to some town on the coast, whence she might reach her friends in England. The plan highly satisfied Martin. It relieved him and his neighbours from the necessity of provoking perilous wrath, and it was far safer for her herself than endeavouring to force her way with an escort too large not to attract notice, yet not warlike enough for efficient defence. He offered no further opposition, but augured that after all she would come back a fine lady, and right them all.

Eustacie, recovering from her anger, and recollecting his services, gave him her hand to kiss, and bade him farewell with a sudden effusion of gratitude and affection that warmed the honest fellow's heart. Rewards could not be given, lest they should become a clue for her uncle; and perhaps they would have wounded both him and their kind hosts, who did their best to assist her in their departure. A hasty meal was provided by Nanon, and a basket so stored as to obviate the need of entering a village, on that day at

least, to purchase provisions; Eustacie's money and jewels again formed the nucleus of the bundle of clothes and spare swaddling-bands of her babe; her peasant dress was carefully arranged—a stout striped cloth skirt and black bodice, the latter covered by a scarlet Chollet kerchief. The winged white cap entirely hid her hair; a grey cloak with a hood could either fold round her and her child or be strapped on her shoulders. Her *sabots* were hung on her shoulder, for she had learnt to go barefoot, and walked much more lightly thus; and her little bundle was slung on a staff on the back of Maître Gardon, who in his great peasant's hat and coat looked so like a picture of St. Joseph, that Eustacie, as the light of the rising sun fell on his white beard and hair, was reminded of the Flight into Egypt, and came close to him, saying shyly, "Our Blessed Lady will bless and feel for my baby. She knows what this journey is."

"The Son of the Blessed Mary assuredly knows and blesses," he answered.

CHAPTER XVI

THE EMPTY CRADLE

"Eager to know
The worst, and with that fatal certainty
To terminate intolerable dread,
He spurred his courser forward—all his fears
Too surely are fulfilled."—SOUTHEY.

CONTRARY winds made the voyage of the *Throstle* much more tardy than had been reckoned on by Berenger's impatience; but hope was before him, and he often remembered his days in the little vessel as much happier than he had known them to be at the time.

It was in the calm days of bright October that Captain Hobbs at length was putting into the little harbour nearest to La Sablerie.

They landed. Could it be that Berenger was only two miles—only half an hour's walk from Eustacie? The bound his heart gave as he touched the shore seemed to stifle him. He could not believe it. Yet he knew how fully he had believed it, the next moment, when he listened to what the fishermen were saying to Captain Hobbs.

"Did Monsieur wish to go to La Sablerie? Ah! then he did not know what had happened. The soldiers had been there; there had been a great burning. They had been out in their boats at sea, but they had seen the sky red—red as a furnace, all night; and the steeple was down. Surely, Monsieur had missed the steeple that was a guide to all poor seafarers; and

now they had to go all the way to Brancour to sell their fish."

The drenching Atlantic mist had wetted them all to the skin, and closed round them so like a solid wall, that they had almost lost sight of each other, and had nothing but the bells' voices to comfort them, till quite suddenly there was a light upon the mist, a hazy reddish gleam—a window seemed close to them. The guide, heartily thanking Our Lady and St. Julian, knocked at a door, which opened at once into a warm, bright, superior sort of kitchen, where a neatly-dressed elderly peasant woman exclaimed, "Welcome, poor souls! Enter, then. Here, good Father, are some bewildered creatures. Eh! wrecked are you, good folks, or lost in the fog?"

At the same moment there came from behind the screen that shut off the fire from the door, a benignant-looking, hale old man in a cassock, with long white hair on his shoulders, and a cheerful face, ruddy from sea-wind.

"Welcome, my friends," he said. "Thanks to the saints who have guided you safely. You are drenched. Come to the fire at once."

And as they moved on into the full light of the fire and the rude iron lamp by which he had been reading, and he saw the draggled plumes and other appurtenances that marked the two youths as gentlemen, he added, "Are you wrecked, Messieurs? We will do our poor best for your accommodation;" and while both mechanically murmured a word of thanks, and removed their soaked hats, the good man exclaimed, as he beheld Berenger's ashy face, with the sunken eyes and deep scars, "Monsieur should come to bed at once. He is apparently recovering from a severe wound. This way, sir; Jolitte shall make you some hot tisane."

"Wait, sir," said Berenger, very slowly, and his voice sounding hollow from exhaustion; "they say that you can tell me of my child. Let me hear."

"Monsieur's child!" exclaimed the bewildered curate, looking from him to Philip, and then to the guide, who poured out a whole stream of explanation before Philip had arranged three words of French.

"You hear, sir," said Berenger, as the man finished: "I came hither to seek my wife, the Lady of Ribau-mont."

"Eh!" exclaimed the *curé*, "do I then see M. le Marquis de Nid-de-Merle?"

"No!" cried Berenger; "no, I am not that *scélérat*! I am her true husband, the Baron de Ribau-mont."

"The Baron de Ribau-mont perished at the St. Bartholomew," said the *curé*, fixing his eyes on him, as though to confute an impostor.

"Ah, would that I had!" said Berenger. "I was barely saved with the life that is but misery now. I came to seek her—I found what you know. They told me that you saved the children. Ah, tell me where mine is?—all that is left me."

"A few poor babes I was permitted to rescue, but very few. But let me understand to whom I speak," he added, much perplexed. "You, sir——"

"I am her husband, married at five years old—contract renewed last year. It was he whom you call Nid-de-Merle who fell on me, and left me for dead. A faithful servant saved my life, but I have lain sick in England till now, when her letter to my mother brought me to La Sablerie, to find—to find *this*. Oh, sir, have pity on me! Tell me if you know anything of her, or if you can give me her child?"

"The orphans I was able to save are—the boys at nurse here, the girls with the good nuns at Luçon,"

said the priest, with infinite pity in his look. "Should you know it, sir?"

"I would—I should," said Berenger. "But it is a girl. Ah, would that it were here! But you—you, sir—you know more than these fellows. Is there no—no hope of herself?"

"Alas! I fear I can give you none," said the priest; "but I will tell all I know; only I would fain see you eat, rest, and be dried."

"How can I?" gasped he, allowing himself, however, to sink into a chair; and the priest spoke:

"Perhaps you know, sir, that the poor Lady fled from her friends, and threw herself upon the Huguenots. All trace had been lost, when, at a banquet given by the mayor of Luçon, there appeared some *pâtisseries*, which some ecclesiastics, who had enjoyed the hospitality of Bellaise, recognized as peculiar to the convent there, where she had been brought up. They were presented to the mayor by his friend, Bailli la Grasse, who had boasted of the excellent *confitures* of the heretic pastor's daughter that lodged in the town of La Sablerie. The place was in disgrace for having afforded shelter and supplies to Montgomery's pirate crews, and there were narrations of outrages committed on Catholics. The army were enraged by their failure before La Rochelle; in effect, it was resolved to make an example, when, on M. de Nid-de-Merle's summons, all knowledge of the Lady was denied. Is it possible that she was indeed not there?"

Berenger shook his head. "She was indeed there," he said, with an irrepressible groan. "Was there no mercy—none?"

"Ask not, sir," said the compassionate priest; "the flesh shrinks, though there may be righteous justice. A pillaged town, when men are enraged, is like a place

of devils unchained. I reached it only after it had been taken by assault, when all was flame and blood. Ask me no more; it would be worse for you to hear, than me to tell," he concluded, shuddering, but laying his hand kindly on Berenger's arm. "At least it is ended now, and God is more merciful than men. Many died by the bombs cast into the city, and she for whom you ask certainly fell not alive into the hands of those who sought her. Take comfort, sir; there is One who watches and takes count of our griefs. Sir," turning to Philip, "this gentleman is too much spent with sorrow to bear this cold and damp. Aid me, I entreat, to persuade him to lie down."

CHAPTER XVII

THE ORPHANS OF LA SABLIERIE

"The cream tarts with pepper in them."—*Arabian Nights*.

HOPE, spring, and recovery carried the young Baron de Ribaumont on his journey infinitely better than his companions had dared to expect. He dreaded nothing so much as being overtaken by those tidings which would make King Charles's order mere waste paper; and therefore pressed on with little regard to his own fatigue, although happily with increasing strength, which carried him a further stage every day.

Luçon was a closely-guarded, thoroughly Catholic city, and his safe-conduct was jealousy demanded; but the name of Ribaumont silenced all doubt. "A relation, apparently, of M. de Nid-de-Merle," said the officer on guard, and politely invited him to dinner and bed at the castle; but these he thought it prudent to decline, explaining that he brought a letter from the King to the Mother Prioress.

The convent walls were pointed out to him, and he only delayed at the inn long enough to arrange his dress as might appear to the Abbess most respectful, and, poor boy, be least likely to startle the babe on whom his heart was set. At almost every inn, the little children had shrieked and run from his white and gashed face, and his tall, lank figure in deep black; and it was very sadly that he said to Philip,

"You must come with me. If she turns from me as an ogre, your bright ruddy face will win her."

The men were left at the inn with charge to let Guibert speak for them, and to avoid showing their nationality. The three months of Paris, and the tailors there, had rendered Philip much less conspicuous than formerly; but still people looked at him narrowly as he followed his brother along the street.

The two lads had made up their minds to encumber themselves with no nurses, or womanfolk. The child should be carried, fondled, and fed by her boy-father alone. He believed that, when he once held her in his arms, he should scarcely even wish to give her up to any one else; and, in his concentration of mind, had hardly thought of all the inconveniences and absurdities that would arise; but, really, was chiefly occupied by the fear that she would not at first let him take her in his arms, and hold her to his heart.

The portress opened her wicket even before the bell could be rung, then eagerly ushered him into the parlour, the barest and most ascetic-looking of rooms, with a boarded partition across, unenlivened except by a grated hollow, and the outer portion empty, save of a table, three chairs, and a rugged woodcut of a very tall St. Ursula, with a crowd of pigmy virgins, not reaching higher than the ample hem of her petticoat.

"Did Aunt Cecily live in such a place as this?" exclaimed Philip, gazing round; "or do they live on the fat among down cushions inside there?"

"Hush—sh," said Berenger, frowning with anxiety; for a rustling was heard behind the screen, and presently a black veil and white scapulary appeared, and a sweet calm voice said, "Peace be with you, sir; what are your commands?"

Berenger bowed low, and replied, "Thanks, reverend

Lady, I bring a letter from the King, to request your aid in a matter that touches me nearly."

"His Majesty shall be obeyed. Come you from him?"

He was forced to reply to her inquiries after the poor King's health before she opened the letter, taking it under her veil to read it; so that as he stood, trembling, almost sickening with anxiety, and scarcely able to breathe, he could see nothing but the black folds; and at her low murmured exclamation he started as if at a cannon-shot.

"De Ribauumont!" she said; "can it be—the child—of—of—our poor dear little *pensionnaire* at Bellaise?"

"It is—it is!" cried Berenger. "O Madame, you knew her at Bellaise?"

"Even so," replied the Prioress, who was in fact the Sœur Monique so loved and regretted by Eustacie. "I loved and prayed for her with all my heart when she was claimed by the world. Heaven's will be done; but the poor little thing loved me, and I have often thought that had I been still at Bellaise when she returned she would not have fled. But of this child I have no knowledge."

"You took charge of the babes of La Sablerie, Madame," said Berenger, almost under his breath.

"Her infant among those poor orphans!" exclaimed the Prioress, more and more startled and amazed.

"If it be anywhere in this life, it is in your good keeping, Madame," said Berenger, with tears in his eyes. "Oh! I entreat, withhold her no longer."

"But," exclaimed the bewildered nun, "who would you then be, sir?"

"I—her husband—widower of Eustacie—father of her orphan!" cried Berenger. "She cannot be detained from me, either by right or law."

"Her husband," still hesitated Monique. "But he

is dead. The poor little one—Heaven have mercy on her soul—wrote me a piteous entreaty, and gave large alms for prayers and masses for his soul.”

The sob in his throat almost strangled his speech. “She mourned me to the last as dead. I was borne away senseless and desperately wounded; and when I recovered power to seek her it was too late! O Madame! have pity—let me see all she has left to me.”

“Is it possible?” said the nun. “We would not learn the parentage of our nurslings since all alike become children of Mother Church.”

“And they escaped!”

“Surely yes, sir, I never saw them again. Maître Tressan the elder prayed with us. And when the cruel soldiers came and demanded the Lady and Maître Isaac, and all obstinate Calvinists, our mayor and my father and the rest made answer that they had no knowledge of the Lady.”

The Prioress, struck, perhaps, by the almost flaxen locks that sparsely waved on his temples, and the hue of the ungloved hand that rested on the edge of the *grille*, said, smiling, “You come of a fair family, Monsieur.”

“The White Ribaumonts,” said Berenger, “and, moreover, my mother was called the Swan of England; my little sisters have skins like snow. Ah! Madame, though I have failed, I go away far happier than if I had succeeded.”

“And I,” she said, “shall cease to pray for that dear one as for one in the grave.”

“Ah! you have prayed for me. Pray still that Heaven will have pity on us, and unite us once more.”

“And reveal the true faith,” began the nun; but Philip in the meantime was nudging his brother, and whispering in English, “No Popish prayers, I say!”

Then, to Philip’s disgust, said, “I took with me my

aunt's blessing when I set out; let me take yours with me also, reverend Mother."

When they were in the street again, Philip railed at him as though he had subjected himself to a spell.

"She is almost a saint," answered Berenger.

"And have we not saints enough of our own, without running after Popish ones behind grates? Brother, if ever the good old days come back of invading France, I'll march straight hither, and deliver the poor little wretches so scandalously mewed up here, and true Protestants all the time!"

"Hush! People are noticing the sound of your English."

"Let them! I never thanked Heaven properly before that I have not a drop of French——" Here Berenger almost shook him by the shoulder, as men turned at his broad tones and foreign words, and he walked on in silence, while Berenger at his side felt as one treading on air, so infinite was the burden taken off his mind. Though for the present absolutely at sea as to where to seek Eustacie, the relief from acquiescence in the horrible fate that had seemed to be hers was such, that a flood of unspeakable happiness seemed to rush in on him, and bear him up with a new infusion of life, buoyancy, and thankfulness.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN THE KING'S NAME

"Under which king, Bezonian? speak or die."

"Under King Harry."—*King Henry IV.*

"ONE bird in the hand is not always worth two in the bush, assuredly," said Philip, when Berenger was calm enough to hold council on what he called this most blessed discovery; "but where to seek them?"

"I have no fears now," returned Berenger. "We have not been borne through so much not to be brought together at last. Soon, soon shall we have her! A minister so distinguished as Isaac Gardon is sure to be heard of either at La Rochelle, Montauban, or Nîmes, their great gathering places."

"For Rochelle, then?" said Philip.

"Even so. We will be off early to-morrow, and from thence, if we do not find her there, as I expect, we shall be able to write the thrice happy news to those at home."

Accordingly, the little cavalcade started in good time, in the cool of the morning of the bright long day of early June, while apple petals floated down on them in the lanes like snow, and nightingales in every hedge seemed to give voice and tune to Berenger's eager, yearning hopes.

Suddenly there was a sound of horses' feet in the road before them, and as they drew aside to make way, a little troop of gendarmes filled the narrow lane. The

officer, a rough, harsh-looking man, laid his hand on Berenger's bridle, with the words, "In the name of the King!"

Philip began to draw his sword with one hand, and with the other to urge his horse between the officer and his brother, but Berenger called out, "Back! This gentleman mistakes my person. I am the Baron de Ribaumont, and have a safe-conduct from the King."

"What king?" demanded the officer.

"From King Charles."

"I arrest you," said the officer, "in the name of King Henry III. and of the Queen Regent Catherine."

"The King dead?" exclaimed Berenger.

"On the 30th of May. Now, sir."

"Your warrant—your cause?" still demanded Berenger.

"There will be time enough for that when you are safely lodged," said the captain, roughly pulling at the rein, which he had held all the time.

"What, no warrant?" shouted Philip, "he is a mere robber!" and with drawn sword he was precipitating himself on the captain, when another gendarme, who had been on the watch, grappled with him, and dragged him off his horse before he could strike a blow. The other two English, Humfrey Holt and John Smithers, strong, full-grown men, rode in fiercely to the rescue, and Berenger himself struggled furiously to loose himself from the captain, and deliver his brother. Suddenly there was the report of a pistol: poor Smithers fell, there was a moment of standing aghast, and in that moment the one man and the two youths were each pounced on by three or four gendarmes, thrown down and pinioned.

"Is this usage for gentlemen?" exclaimed Berenger, as he was roughly raised to his feet.

"The King's power has been resisted," was all the

answer; and when he would have bent to see how it was with poor Smithers, one of the men-at-arms kicked over the body with sickening brutality, saying, "Dead enough, heretic and English carrion!"

Philip uttered a cry of loathing horror, and turned white; Berenger, above all else, felt a sort of frenzied despair as he thought of the peril of the boy who had been trusted to him.

"Have you had enough, sir?" said the captain. "Mount and come."

They could only let themselves be lifted to their horses, and their hands were then set free to use their bridles, each being guarded by a soldier on each side of him. Philip attempted but once to speak, and that in English, "Next time I shall take my pistol."

He was rudely silenced, and rode on with wide-open stolid eyes and dogged face, steadfastly resolved that no Frenchman should see him flinch, and vexed that Berenger had his riding mask on so that his face could not be studied; while he, on his side, was revolving all causes possible for his arrest, and all means of enforcing the liberation, if not of himself, at least of Philip and Humfrey. He looked round for Guibert, but could not see him.

They rode on through the intricate lanes till the sun was high and scorching, and Berenger felt how far he was from perfect recovery. At last, however, some little time past noon, the gendarmes halted at a stone fountain, outside a village, and disposing a sufficient guard around his captives, the officer permitted them to dismount and rest, while he, with the rest of the troop and the horses, went to the village *cabaret*. Philip would have asked his brother what it meant, and what was to be done, but Berenger shook his head, and intimated that silence was safest at present, since they might be listened to; and Philip, who so much imagined



"A LOW HILL, ON THE SUMMIT OF WHICH STOOD A
CHATEAU"

treachery and iniquity to be the order of the day in France that he was scarcely surprised at the present disaster, resigned himself to the same sullen endurance. Provisions and liquor were presently sent up from the inn, but Berenger could taste nothing but the cold water of the fountain, which trickled out cool and fresh beneath an arch surmounted by a figure of our Lady. He bathed his face and head in the refreshing spring, and lay down on a cloak in the shade, Philip keeping a constant change of drenched kerchiefs on his brow, and hoping that he slept, till at the end of two or three hours the captain returned, gave the word to horse, and the party rode on through intricate lanes, blossoming with hawthorn, and ringing with songs of birds that spoke a very different language now to Berenger's heart from what they had said in the hopeful morning.

A convent bell was ringing to evensong, when passing its gateway, the escort turned up a low hill, on the summit of which stood a chateau, covering a considerable extent of ground, with a circuit of wall, white-washed so as perfectly to glare in the evening sun; at every angle a round, slim turret, crowned by a brilliant red-tiled extinguisher-like cap; and the whole surmounted by a tall, old keep in the centre. There was a square projection containing an arched gateway, with heavy doorways, which were thrown open as the party approached. Philip looked up as he rode in, and over the doorway beheld the familiar fretted shield, with the leopard in the corner, and "*A moi Ribaumont*" round it. Could it then be Berenger's own castle, and was it thus that he was approaching it? He himself had not looked up; he was utterly spent with fatigue, dejection, and the severe headache brought on by the heat of the sun, and was only intent on rallying his powers for the crisis of fate that was probably ap-

proaching; and thus scarcely took note of the court into which he rode, lying between the gateway and the *corps de logis*, a building erected when comfort demanded more space than was afforded by the old keep, against which one end leant; but still, though inclosed in a court, the lower windows were small and iron-barred, and all air of luxury was reserved for the mul-lioned casements of the upper story. The court was flagged, but grass shot up between the stones, and the trim air of ease and inhabited comfort to which the brothers were used at home was utterly wanting. Berenger was hustled off his horse, and roughly pushed through a deep porch, where the first thing he heard was the Chevalier de Ribaumont's voice in displeasure.

"How now, sir; hands off! Is this the way you conduct my nephew?"

"He resisted, sir."

"Sir," said Berenger, advancing into the hall, "I know not the meaning of this. I am peacefully travelling with a passport from the King, when I am set upon, no warrant shown me, my faithful servant slain, myself and my brother, an English subject, shamefully handled."

"The violence shall be visited on whatever rascal durst insult a gentleman and my nephew," said the Chevalier. "For release, it shall be looked to; but unfortunately it is too true that there are orders from the Queen in Council for your apprehension, and it was only on my special entreaty for the honour of the family, and the affection I bear you, that I was allowed to receive you here instead of your being sent to an ordinary prison."

"On what pretext?" demanded Berenger.

"It is known that you have letters in your possession from escaped traitors now in England, to La Noue, Duplessis Mornay, and other heretics."

"That is easily explained," said Berenger. "You know well, sir, that they were to facilitate my search at La Sablerie. You shall see them yourself, sir."

"That I must assuredly do," replied the Chevalier, "for it is the order of her Majesty, I regret to say, that your person and baggage be searched;" then, as indignant colour rushed into Berenger's face, and an angry exclamation was beginning, he added, "Nay, I understand, my dear cousin, it is very painful, but we would spare you as much as possible. It will be quite enough if the search is made by myself in the presence of this gentleman, who will only stand by for form's sake. I have no doubt it will enable us quickly to clear up matters, and set you free again. Do me the honour to follow me to the chamber destined for you."

"Let me see the order for my arrest," said Berenger, holding his head high.

"The English scruple must be gratified," said the Chevalier. And accordingly the gendarme captain unfolded before him a paper, which was evidently a distinct order to arrest and examine the person of Henri Bérenger Eustache, Baron de Ribaumont and Sieur de Leurre, suspected of treasonable practices—and it bore the signature of Catherine.

"There is nothing here said of my stepfather's son, Philip Thistlewood, nor of my servant, Humfrey Holt," said Berenger, gathering the sense with his dizzy eyes as best he could. "They cannot be detained, being born subject of the Queen of England."

"They intercepted the justice of the King," said the captain, laying his hand on Philip's shoulder. "I shall have them off with me to the garrison of Luçon, and deal with them there."

"Wait!" said the Chevalier, interposing before Berenger's fierce, horror-struck expostulation could break

forth; "this is an honourable young gentleman, son of a chevalier of good reputation in England, and he need not be so harshly dealt with. You will not separate either him or the poor groom from my nephew, so the Queen's authority be now rightly acknowledged."

The captain shrugged his shoulders, as if displeased; and the Chevalier, turning to Berenger, said, "You understand, nephew, the lot of you all depends on your not giving umbrage to these officers of her Majesty. I will do my poor best for you; but submission is first needed."

Berenger knew enough of his native country to be aware that *la justice du Roi* was a terrible thing, and that Philip's resistance had really put him in so much danger that it was needful to be most careful not further to offend the functionary of Government; and abhorrent as the proposed search was to him, he made no further objection, but taking Philip's arm, lest they should be separated, he prepared to follow wherever he was to be conducted. The Chevalier led the way along a narrow stone passage, with loophole-windows here and there; and Philip, for all his proud, indifferent bearing, felt his flesh creep as he looked for a stair descending into the bowels of the earth. A stair there was, but it went up instead of down, and after mounting this, and going through a sort of ante-room, a door was opened into a tolerably spacious apartment, evidently in the old keep; for the two windows on opposite sides were in an immensely massive wall, and the floor above and vaulting below were of stone; but otherwise there was nothing repulsive in the appearance of the room. There was a wood fire on the hearth; the sun, setting far to the north, peeped in aslant at one window; a mat was on the floor, tapestry on the lower part of the walls; a table and chairs, and a walnut chest, with a chess-board and a few books on

it, were as much furniture as was to be seen in almost any living-room of the day. Humfrey and Guibert, too, were already there, with the small riding valises they and poor Smithers had had in charge. These were at once opened, but contained merely clothing and linen, nothing else that was noticed, except three books, at which the captain looked with a stupid air; and the Chevalier did not seem capable of discovering more than that all three were Latin—one, he believed, the Bible.

"Yes, sir, the Vulgate—a copy older than the Reformation, so not liable to be called an heretical version," said Berenger, to whom a copy had been given by Lady Walwyn, as more likely to be saved if his baggage were searched. "The other is the Office and Psalter after our English rite; and this last is not mine, but Mr. Sidney's—a copy of Virgilius Maro, which he had left behind at Paris."

The Chevalier, not willing to confess that he had taken the English Prayer-book for Latin, hastily said, "Nothing wrong there—no, no, nothing that will hurt the State; may it only be so with what you carry on your person, fair cousin. Stand back, gentlemen, this is gear for myself alone. Now, fair nephew," he added, "not a hand shall be laid on you, if you will give me your honourable word, as a nobleman, that you are laying before me all that you carry about you."

An instant's thought convinced Berenger that resistance would save nothing, and merely lead to indignity to himself and danger to Philip; and therefore he gave the promise to show everything about him, without compulsion. Accordingly, he produced his purse for current expenses, poor King Charles's safe-conduct, and other articles of no consequence, from his pockets; then reluctantly opened his doublet, and took off the belt containing his store of gold, which had

been replenished at Walsingham's. This was greedily eyed by the captain, but the Chevalier at once made it over to Philip's keeping, graciously saying, "We do no more than duty requires;" but at the same time he made a gesture towards another small purse that hung round Berenger's neck by a black ribbon.

"On my sacred word and honour," said Berenger, "it contains nothing important to any save myself."

"Alas! my bounden duty," urged the Chevalier.

An angry reply died on Berenger's lip. At the thought of Philip, he opened the purse, and held out the contents on his palm: a tiny gold ring, a tress of black hair, a fragment of carnation-ribbon pricked with pin-holes, a string of small worthless yellow shells, and, threaded with them, a large pear-shaped pearl of countless price. Even the Chevalier was touched at the sight of this treasury, resting on the blanched palm of the thin, trembling hand, and jealously watched by eyes glistening with sudden moisture, though the lips were firm set. "Alas! my poor young cousin," he said, "you loved her well."

"Not loved, but love," muttered Berenger to himself, as if having recourse to the only cordial that could support him through the present suffering; and he was closing his fingers again over his precious hoard, when the Chevalier added, "Stay! nephew—that pearl?"

"Is one of the chaplet; the token she sent to England," he answered.

"*Pauvre petite!* Then, at least a fragment remains of the reward of our ancestor's courage," said the Chevalier.

And Berenger did not feel it needful to yield up that still better possession, stored within his heart, that *la petite* and her pearls were safe together. It was less unendurable to produce the leather case from

a secret pocket within his doublet, since, unwilling as he was that any eye should scan the letters it contained, there was nothing in them that could give any clue towards tracing her. Nothing had been written or received since his interview with the children at Luçon. There was, indeed, Eustacie's letter to his mother, a few received at Paris from Lord Walwyn, reluctantly consenting to his journey in quest of his child, his English passport, the unfortunate letters to La Noue; and what evidently startled the Chevalier more than all the rest, the copy of the certificate of the ratification of the marriage; but his consternation was so arranged as to appear to be all on behalf of his young kinsman. "This is serious!" he said, striking his forehead, "you will be accused of forging the late King's name."

"This is but a copy," said Berenger, pointing to the heading; "the original has been sent with our Ambassador's despatches to England."

"It is a pity," said the Chevalier, looking thoroughly vexed, "that you should have brought fresh difficulties on yourself for a mere piece of waste paper, since, as things unhappily stand, there is no living person to be affected by the validity of your marriage. Dear cousin,"—he glanced at the officer and lowered his voice—"let me tear this paper; it would only do you harm, and the Papal decree annuls it."

"I have given my word," said Berenger, "that all that could do me harm should be delivered up! Besides," he added, "even had I the feeling for my own honour and that of my wife and child, living or dead, the harm, it seems to me, would be to those who withhold her lands from me."

"Ah! fair nephew! you have fallen among designing persons who have filled your head with absurd claims; but I will not argue the point now, since it

becomes a family, not a State matter. These papers"—and he took them into his hand—"must be examined, and to-morrow Captain Delarue will take them to Paris, with any explanation you may desire to offer. Meantime you and your companions remain my guests, at full liberty, provided you will give me your parole to attempt no escape."

"No, sir," said Berenger hotly, "we will not become our own jailers, nor acquiesce in this unjust detention. I warn you that I am a naturalized Englishman, acknowledged by the Queen as my grandfather's heir, and the English Ambassador will inform the Court what Queen Elizabeth thinks of such dealings with her subjects."

"Well said," exclaimed Philip, and drawing himself up, he added, "I refuse my parole, and warn you that it is at your peril that you imprison an Englishman."

"Very well, gentlemen," said the Chevalier; "the difference will be that I shall unwillingly be forced to let Captain Delarue post guards at the outlets of this tower. A room beneath is prepared for your grooms, and the court is likewise free to you. I will endeavour to make your detention as little irksome as you will permit, and meantime allow me to show you your sleeping chamber." He then politely, as if he had been ushering a prince to his apartment, led the way, pointing to the door through which they had entered the keep, and saying, "This is the only present communication with the dwelling-house. Two gendarmes will always be on the outside." He conducted the young men up a stone spiral stair to another room, over that which they had already seen, and furnished as fairly as ordinary sleeping chambers were wont to be.

Here, said their compulsory host, he would leave them to prepare for supper, when they would do him

the honour to join him in the eating-hall on their summons by the steward.

His departing bow was duly returned by Berenger, but no sooner did his steps die away on the stairs than the young man threw himself on his bed, in a paroxysm of suffering, both mental and bodily.

"Berry, Berry, what is this? Speak to me. What does it all mean?" cried Philip.

"How can I tell?" said Berenger, showing his face for a moment, covered with tears; "only that my only friend is dead, and some villanous trick has seized me, just—just as I might have found her. And I've been the death of my poor groom, and got you into the power of these vile dastards! Oh, would that I had come alone! Would that they had had the sense to aim direct!"

"Brother, brother, anything but this!" cried Philip. "The rogues are not worth it. Sir Francis will have us out in no time, or know the reason why. I'd scorn to let them wring a tear from me."

"I hope they never may, dear Phil, nor anything worse."

"Now," continued Philip, "the way will be to go down to supper, since they will have it so, and sit and eat at one's ease as if one cared for them no more than cat and dog. Hark! there's the steward speaking to Guibert. Come, Berry, wash your face and come."

"I—my head aches far too much, were there nothing else."

"What! it is nothing but the sun," said Philip. "Put a bold face on it, man, and show them how little you heed."

"How *little* I heed!" bitterly repeated Berenger, turning his face away, utterly unnerved between disappointment, fatigue, and pain; and Philip at that

moment had little mercy. Dismayed and vaguely terrified, yet too resolute in national pride to betray his own feelings, he gave vent to his vexation by impatience with a temperament more visibly sensitive than his own: "I never thought you so mere a Frenchman," he said contemptuously. "If you weep and wail so like a sick wench, they will soon have their will of you! I'd have let them kill me before they searched me."

"'Tis bad enough without this from you, Phil," said Berenger faintly, for he was far too much spent for resentment or self-defence, and had only kept up before the Chevalier by dint of strong effort. Philip was somewhat aghast, both at the involuntary gesture of pain, and at finding there was not even spirit to be angry with him: but his very dismay served at the moment only to feed his displeasure; and he tramped off in his heavy boots, which he chose to wear as a proof of disdain for his companions. He explained that M. de Ribaumont was too much fatigued to come to supper, and he was accordingly marched along the corridor, with the steward before him bearing a lighted torch, and two gendarmes with halberds behind him. And in his walk he had ample time for, first, the resolution that illness, and not dejection, should have all the credit of Berenger's absence; then for recollecting of how short standing had been his brother's convalescence; and lastly, for a fury of self-execration for his own unkindness, rude taunts, and neglect of the recurring illness. He would have turned about and gone back at once, but the two gendarmes were close behind, and he knew Humfrey would attend to his brother; so he walked on to the hall—a handsome chamber, hung with armour and spoils of hunting, with a few pictures on the panels, and a great carved music-gallery at one end. The table was laid out

somewhat luxuriously for four, according to the innovation which was beginning to separate the meals of the *grande*s from those of their household.

Great concern was expressed by the Chevalier, as Philip, in French, much improved since the time of his conversation with Madame de Selinville, spoke of his brother's indisposition, saying with emphasis, as he glared at Captain Delarue, that Maitre Paré had forbidden all exposure to mid-day heat, and that all their journeys had been made in morning or evening coolness. "My young friend," as his host called him, "should, he was assured, have mentioned this, since Captain Delarue had no desire but to make his situation as little painful as possible." And the Chevalier sent his steward at once to offer everything the house contained that his prisoner could relish for supper; and then anxiously questioned Philip on his health and diet, obtaining very short and glum answers. The Chevalier and the captain glanced at each other with little shrugs; and Philip, becoming conscious of his shock hair, splashed doublet, and dirty boots, had vague doubts whether his English dignity were not being regarded as English lubberliness; but, of course, he hated the two Frenchmen all the more, and received their civility with greater gruffness. They asked him the present object of his journey—though, probably, the Chevalier knew it before, and he told of the hope that they had of finding the child at Luçon.

"Vain, of course?" said the Chevalier. "Poor infant! It is well for itself, as for the rest of us, that its troubles were ended long ago."

Philip started indignantly.

"Does your brother still nurture any vain hope?" said the Chevalier.

"Not vain, I trust," said Philip.

"Indeed! Who can foolishly have so inspired him

with a hope that merely wears out his youth, and leads him into danger?"

Philip held his tongue, resolved to be impenetrable; and he was so far successful, that the Chevalier merely became convinced that the brothers were not simply riding to La Rochelle to embark for England, but had some hope and purpose in view; though as to what that might be, Philip's bluff replies and stubborn silence were baffling.

After the meal, the Chevalier insisted on coming to see how his guest fared; and Philip could not prevent him. They found Berenger sitting on the side of his bed, having evidently just started up on hearing their approach. Otherwise he did not seem to have moved since Philip left him; he had not attempted to undress; and Humfrey told Philip that not a word had been extracted from him, but commands to let him alone.

However, he had rallied his forces to meet the Chevalier, and answered manfully to his excuses for the broiling ride to which he had been exposed, that it mattered not, the effect would pass, it was a mere chance; and refused all offers of medicaments, potions, and *tisanes*, till his host at length left the room with a most correct exchange of good nights.

"Berry, Berry, what a brute I have been!" cried Philip.

"Foolish lad!" and Berenger half smiled. "Now help me to bed, for the room turns round!"

While Berenger slept a heavy morning's sleep after a restless night, Philip explored the narrow domain above and below. The keep and its little court had evidently been the original castle, built when the oddly-nicknamed Fulkes and Geoffreys of Anjou had been at daggers drawn with the Dukes of Normandy and Brittany, but it had since, like most other such ancient feudal fortresses, become the nucleus of walls and

buildings for use, defense, or ornament, that lay beneath him like a spider's web, when he had gained the roof of the keep, garnished with pepper-box turrets at each of the four angles. Beyond lay the green copses and orchards of the Bocage, for it was true, as he had at first suspected, that this was the Château de Nid-de-Merle, and that Berenger was a captive in his wife's own castle.

Chances of escape were the lad's chief thought, but the building on which he stood went sheer down for a considerable way. Then on the north side there came out the sharp, high-pitched, tiled roof of the *corps du logis*; on the south, another roof, surmounted by a cross at the gable, and evidently belonging to the chapel; on the other two sides lay courts—that to the east, a stable-yard; that to the west, a small narrow, chilly-looking, paved inclosure, with enormously-massive walls, the doorway walled up, and looking like a true prison-yard. Beyond this wall—indeed, on every side—extended offices, servants' houses, stables, untidy desolate-looking gardens, and the whole was inclosed by the white wall with flanking red-tiled turrets, whose gaudy appearance had last night made Philip regard the whole as a flimsy, Frenchified erection, but he now saw it to be of extremely solid stone and lime, and with no entrance but the great barbican gateway they had entered by; moreover, with a yawning, dry moat all round. Wherever he looked he saw these tall, pointed red caps, resembling, he thought, those worn by the victims of an *auto-da fé*, as one of Walsingham's secretaries had described them to him; and he ground his teeth at them, as though they grinned at him like emissaries of the Inquisition.

Descending, he found Berenger dressing in haste to avoid receiving an invalid visit from the Chevalier, looking indeed greatly shaken, but hardly so as would

have been detected by eyes that had not seen him during his weeks of hope and recovery. He was as resolved as Philip could wish against any sign of weakness before his enemy, and altogether disclaimed illness, refusing the stock of cooling drinks, cordials, and febrifuges, which the Chevalier said had been sent by his sister the Abbess of Bellaise. He put the subject of his health aside, only asking if this were the day that the gendarme-captain would return to Paris, and then begging to see that officer, so as to have a distinct understanding of the grounds of his imprisonment. The captain had, however, been a mere instrument; and when Philip clamoured to be taken before the next justice of the peace, even Berenger smiled at him for thinking that such a being existed in France. The only cause alleged was the vague but dangerous suspicion of conveying correspondence between England and the heretics, and this might become extremely perilous to one undeniably half English, regarded as whole Huguenot, caught on the way to La Rochelle with a letter to La Noue in his pocket; and, moreover, to one who had had a personal affray with a king famous for storing up petty offenses, whom the last poor king had favoured, and who, in fine, had claims to estates that could not be spared to the Huguenot interest.

CHAPTER XIX

THE ITALIAN PEDLAR

"This caitiff monk for gold did swear,
That by his drugs my rival fair
A saint in heaven should be."

SCOTT.

A GRAND cavalcade bore the house of Quinet from Montauban—coaches, wagons, outriders, gendarmes—it was a perfect court progress, and so slow and cumbrous that it was a whole week in reaching a grand old castle standing on a hill-side among chestnut woods, with an avenue a mile long leading up to it; and battlemented towers fit to stand a siege.

Eustacie who had meanwhile found refuge with Madame de Quinet was ranked among the Duchess's gentlewomen. She was so far acknowledged as a lady of birth, that she was usually called Madame Espérance; and though no one was supposed to doubt her being Théodore Gardon's widow, she was regarded as being a person of rank who had made a misalliance by marrying him. This Madame de Quinet had allowed the household to infer, thinking that the whole bearing of her guest was too unlike that of a Paris *bourgeoise* not to excite suspicion, but she deemed it wiser to refrain from treating her with either intimacy or distinction that might excite jealousy or suspicion. Even as it was, the consciousness of a secret, or the remnants of Montauban gossip, prevented any familiarity between Eustacie and the good ladies who surrounded

her; they were very civil to each other, but their only connecting link was the delight that every one took in petting pretty little Rayonette, and the wonder that was made of her signs of intelligence and attempts at talking. Even when she toddled fearlessly up to the stately Duchess on her canopied throne, and held out her entreating hands, and lisped the word "*montre*," Madame would pause in her avocations, take her on her knee, and display that wonderful gold and enamel creature which cried tic-tic, and still remained an unapproachable mystery to M. le Marquis and M. le Vicomte, her grandsons.

Pale, formal stiff boys they looked, twelve and ten years old, and under the dominion of a very learned tutor, who taught them Latin, Greek and Hebrew, alternately with an equally precise, stiff old esquire, who trained them in martial exercises, which seemed to be as much matters of rote with them as their tasks, and to be quite as uninteresting. It did not seem as if they ever played, or thought of playing; and if they were ever to be gay, witty Frenchmen, a wonderful change must come over them.

When the dinner bell rang, and the whole household dropped down from *salon*, library, study, or chamber to the huge hall, with its pavement of black and white marble, and its long tables, for Madame de Quinet was no woman to discard wholesome old practices.

Then, as Eustacie, with Rayonette trotting at her side, and Maître Isaac leaning on her arm, slowly made her way to that high table where dined Madame la Duchesse, her grandsons, the ministers, the gentlemen in waiting, and some three or four women besides herself, she saw that the lower end of the great hall was full of silks, cloths, and ribbons heaped together; and, passing by the lengthy rank of retainers, she re-

ceived a bow and look of recognition from a dark, acute-looking visage which she remembered to belong to the pedlar she had met at Charente.

The Duchess, at the head of her table, was not in the best of humours. Her son had sent home letters by a courier whom he had picked up for himself and she never liked nor trusted, and he required an immediate reply when she particularly resented being hurried. It was a *galimafré*, literally a hash, she said; for indeed most matters where she was not consulted, did become a *galimafré* with her. Moreover, under favour of the courier, her porters had admitted this pedlar, and the Duchess greatly disliked pedlars. All her household stores were bought at shops of good repute in Montauban, and no one ought to be so improvident as to require dealings with these mountebank vagabonds, who dangled vanities before the eyes of silly girls, and filled their heads with Paris fashions, if they did not do still worse, and excite them to the purchase of cosmetics and love-charms.

Yet the excitement caused by the approach of a pedlar was invincible, even by Madame la Duchesse. It was inevitable that the crying need of glove, kerchief, needle, or the like, should be discovered as soon as he came within ken, and, once in the hall, there was no being rid of him except by a flagrant act of inhospitality. This time, it was worst of all, for M. le Marquis himself must needs be the first to spy him, bring him in, and be in want of a silver chain for his hawk; and his brother the Vicomte must follow him up with all manner of wants inspired by the mere sight of the pack.

Every one with the smallest sum of money must buy, every one without inspect and assist in bargaining; and all dinner time, eyes, thoughts, and words were wandering to the gay pile in the corner, or reckoning

up needs and means. The pedlar, too, knew what a Calvinist household was, and had been extremely discreet, producing nothing that could reasonably be objected to; and the Duchess, seeing that the stream was too strong for her, wisely tried to steer her bark through it safely instead of directly opposing it.

As soon as grace was over, she called her maître d'hôtel, and bade him look after that *galimafré*, and see that none of these fools were unreasonably cheated, and that there was no attempt at gulling the young ones with charms or fortune-telling, as well as to conclude the matter so as to give no excuse for the Italian fellow lingering to sup and sleep. She then retired to her cabinet to prepare her despatches, which were to include a letter to Lord Walwyn. Though a nominal friendship subsisted between Elizabeth and the French court, the Huguenot chiefs always maintained a correspondence with England, and there was little danger but that the Duke de Quinet would be able to get a letter, sooner or later, conveyed to any man of mark. In the course of her letter, Madame de Quinet found it necessary to refer to Eustacie. She rang her little silver handbell for the little foot-page, who usually waited outside her door. He appeared not. She rang again, and receiving no answer, opened her door and sallied forth, a wrathful dame, into the hall. There, of course, Master Page had been engulfed in the *galimafré*, and not only forming one of the swarm around the pedlar, but was actually aping courtly grimaces as he tried a delicate lace ruffle on the hand of a silly little smirking maiden, no older than himself! But this little episode was, like many others, overlooked by Madame de Quinet, as her eye fell upon the little figure of Rayonette standing on the table, with her mother and two or three ladies besides coaxing her to open her mouth, and show the swollen

gums that had of late been troubling her, while the pedlar was evidently expending his blandishments upon her.

The maître d'hôtel was the first to perceive his mistress, and, as he approached, received a sharp rebuke from her for allowing the fellow to produce his quack medicines; and, at the same time, she desired him to request Madame Espérance to come to her immediately on business. Eustacie, who always had a certain self-willed sense of opposition when the Duchess showed herself peremptory towards her, at first began to make answer that she would come as soon as her business was concluded; but the steward made a gesture towards the great lady sailing up and down as she paced the daïs in stately impatience. "Good fellow," she said, "I will return quickly, and see you again, though I am now interrupted. Stay there, little one, with good Mademoiselle Perrot; mother will soon be back."

Rayonette, in her tooth-fretfulness, was far from enduring to be forsaken so near a strange man, and her cry made it necessary for Eustacie to take her in arms, and carry her to the daïs where the Duchess was waiting.

"So!" said the lady, "I suspected that the fellow was a quack as well as a cheat."

"Madame," said Eustacie, with spirit, "he sold me unguents that greatly relieved my father last spring."

"And because rubbing relieved an old man's rheumatics, you would let a vagabond cheat drug and sicken this poor child for what is no ailment at all—and the teeth will relieve in a few days. Or, if she were feverish, have not we decoctions brewed from heaven's own pure herbs in the garden, with no unknown ingredient?"

"Madame," said Eustacie, ruffling into fierceness,

"you are very good to me; but I must keep the management of my daughter to myself."

The Duchess looked at her from head to foot. Perhaps it was with an impulse to treat her impertinence as she would have done that of a dependant; but the old lady never forgot herself: she only shrugged her shoulders and said, with studied politeness, "When I unfortunately interrupted your consultation with this eminent physician, it was to ask you a question regarding this English family. Will you do me the honour to enter my cabinet?"

And whereas no one was looking, the old lady showed her displeasure by ushering Madame de Ribau-mont into her cabinet like a true noble stranger guest; so that Eustacie felt disconcerted.

The Duchess then began to read aloud her own letter to Lord Walwyn, pausing at every clause, so that Eustacie felt the delay and discussion growing interminable, and the Duchess then requested to have Madame de Ribaumont's own letter at once, as she wished to inclose it, make up her packet, and send it without delay. Opening a secret door in her cabinet, she showed Eustacie a stair by which she might reach Maître Gardon's room without crossing the hall. Eustacie hoped to find him there and tell him how intolerable was the Duchess; but, though she found him, it was in company with the tutor, who was spending an afternoon on Plato with him. She could only take up her letter and retreat to Madame's cabinet, where she had left her child. She finished it as best she might, addressed it after the herald's spelling of the title, bound it with some of the Duchess's black floss silk—wondering meanwhile, but little guessing that the pedlar knew, where was the tress that had bound her last attempt at correspondence, guessing least of all that that tress lay on a heart still living and throb-

bing for her. All this had made her a little forget her haste to assert her liberty of action by returning to the pedlar; but, behold, when she came back to the hall, it had resumed its pristine soberness, and merely a few lingering figures were to be seen, packing up their purchases.

While she was still looking round in dismay, Mademoiselle Perrot came up to her and said, "Ah! Madame, you may well wonder! I never saw Maître Benoît there so cross; the poor man did but offer to sell little Fanchon the elixir that secures a good husband, and old Benoît descended on him like a griffin enraged, would scarce give him time to compute his charges or pack his wares, but hustled him forth like a mere thief! And I missed my bargain for that muffler that had so taken my fancy. But, Madame, he spoke to me apart, and said you were an old customer of his, and that rather than the little angel should suffer with her teeth, which surely threaten convulsions, he would leave with you this sovereign remedy of sweet syrup—a spoonful to be given each night."

Eustacie took the little flask. She was much inclined to give the syrup by way of precaution, as well as to assure herself that she was not under the Duchess's dominion; but some strong instinct of the truth of the lady's words that the child was safer and healthier undoctored, made her resolve at least to defer it until the little one showed any perilous symptom. And as happily Rayonette only showed two little white teeth, and much greater good humour, the syrup was nearly forgotten, when, a fortnight after, the Duchess received a despatch from her son which filled her with the utmost indignation. The courier had indeed arrived, but the packet had proved to be filled with hay and waste paper. And upon close examination, under the lash, the courier had been forced to confess to

having allowed himself to be overtaken by the pedlar, and treated by him to a supper at a *cabaret*. No doubt, while he was afterwards asleep, the contents of his packet had been abstracted. There had been important documents for the Duke besides Eustacie's letters, and the affair greatly annoyed the Duchess, though she had the compensation of having been proved perfectly right in her prejudice against pedlars, and her dislike of her son's courier. She sent for Eustacie to tell her privately of the loss, and of course the young mother at once turned pale and exclaimed, "The wicked one! Ah! what a blessing that I gave my little darling none of his dose!"

"*Hein?* You had some from him then!" demanded the Duchess with displeasure.

"No, Madame, thanks, thanks to you. Oh! I will never be self-willed and naughty again. Forgive me, Madame." And down she dropped on her knee, with clasped hands and glistening eyes.

"Forgive you, silly child, for what?" said Madame de Quinet, nearly laughing.

"Ah! for the angry, passionate thoughts I had! Ah! Madame, I was all but giving the stuff to my little angel in very spite—and then——" Eustacie's voice was drowned in a passion of tears, and she devoured the old lady's hand with her kisses.

"Come, come," said the Duchess, "let us be reasonable. A man may be a thief, but it does not follow that he is poisoner."

"Nay, that will we see," cried Eustacie. "He was resolved that the little lamb should not escape, and he left a flask for her with Mademoiselle Perrot. I will fetch it, if Madame will give me leave. Oh, the great mercy of Heaven that made her so well that I gave her none!"

Madame de Quinet's analytic powers did not go

very far, and would probably have decided against the syrup if it had been nothing but virgin honey. She was one who fully believed that her dear Queen Jeanne had been poisoned with a pair of gloves, and she had unlimited faith in the powers of evil possessed by René of Milan. Of course, she detected the presence of a slow poison, whose effects would have been attributed to the ailment it was meant to cure; and though her evidence was insufficient, she probably did Ercole no injustice. She declined testing the compound on any unfortunate dog or cat, but sealed it up in the presence of Gardon, Eustacie, and Mademoiselle Perrot, to be produced against the pedlar if ever he should be caught.

Then she asked Eustacie if there was any reason to suspect that he recognized her. Eustacie related the former dealings with him, when she had sold him her jewels and her hair, but she had no notion of his being the same person whom she had seen when at Montpipeau. Indeed, he had altered his appearance so much that he had been only discovered at Nid-de-Merle by eyes sharpened by distrust of his pretensions to magic arts.

Madame de Quinet, however, concluded that Eustacie had been known, or else that her jewels had betrayed her, and that the man must have been employed by her enemies. If it had not been the depth of winter, she would have provided for the persecuted lady's immediate transmission to England; but the storms of the Bay of Biscay would have made this impossible in the state of French navigation, even if Isaac Gardon had been in a condition to move; for the first return of cold had brought back severe rheumatic pains, and with them came a shortness of breath, which even the Duchess did not know to be the token of heart complaint. He was confined to his room,

and it was kneeling by his bedside that Eustacie poured out her thankfulness for her child's preservation, and her own repentance for the passing fit of self-will and petulance. The thought of Rayonette's safety seemed absolutely to extinguish the fresh anxiety that had arisen since it had become evident that her enemies no longer supposed her dead, but were probably upon her traces. Somehow, danger had become almost a natural element to her, and having once expressed her firm resolution that nothing should separate her from her adopted father, to whom indeed her care became constantly more necessary, she seemed to occupy herself very little with the matter; she nursed him as cheerfully and fondly, and played with Rayonette as merrily as ever, and left to him and Madame de Quinet the grave consultations as to what was to be done for her security. There was a sort of natural buoyancy about her that never realized a danger till it came, and then her spirit was roused to meet it.

CHAPTER XX

SPELL AND POTION

"Churl, upon thy eyes I throw
All the power this charm doth owe."
Midsummer Night's Dream.

HER rival lived! The tidings could not but be communicated to Diane de Selinville, when her father set out *en grande tenue* to demand his niece from the Duke de Quinet. This, however, was not till spring was advancing; for the pedlar had not been able to take a direct route back to Nid-de-Merle, since his first measure had necessarily been to escape into a province where the abstraction of a Huguenot nobleman's despatches would be considered as a meritorious action. Winter weather, and the practice of his profession likewise, delayed Ercole so much that it was nearly Easter before he brought his certain intelligence to the Chevalier, and to the lady an elixir of love, clear and colourless as crystal, and infallible as an inspirer of affection.

Should she administer it, now that she knew her cousin not to be the lawful object of affection she had so long esteemed him, but, as he persisted in considering himself, a married man? • Diane had more scruples than she would have had a year before, for she had not so long watched and loved one so true and conscientious as Berenger de Ribaumont without having her perceptions elevated; but at the same time the passion of love had become intensified, both by long

continuance and by resistance. She had attached herself, believing him free, and her affections could not be disentangled by learning that he was bound—rather the contrary.

Yet a little while then would she be patient, even though nearly a year had passed and still she saw no effect upon her prisoners, unless, indeed, Philip had drunk of one of her potions by mistake and his clumsy admiration was the consequence. The two youths went on exactly in the same manner, without a complaint, without a request, occupying themselves as best they might—Berenger courteously attentive to her father, and coldly courteous to herself. He had entirely recovered his health, and the athletic powers displayed by the two brothers when wrestling, fencing, or snow-balling in the courtyard, were the amazement and envy of their guard. Twice in the course of the winter there had been an alarm of wolves, and in their eagerness and excitement about this new sport, they had accepted the Chevalier's offer of taking their parole for the hunt. They had then gone forth with a huge posse of villagers, who beat the woods with their dogs till the beast was aroused from its lair and driven into the alleys, where waited gentlemen, gendarmes, and gamekeepers with their guns. These two chases were chiefly memorable to Berenger, because in the universal intermingling of shouting peasants he was able in the first to have some conversation with Eustacie's faithful protector Martin, who told him the incidents of her wanderings, with tears in his eyes, and blessed him for his faith that she was not dead; and in the second, he actually found himself in the ravine of the Grange du Temple. No need to ask, every voice was shouting the name, and though the gendarmes were round him and he durst not speak to Rotrou, still he could reply with significative earnest-

ness to the low bow with which the farmer bent to evident certainty that here was the imprisoned Protestant husband of the poor lady. Berenger wore his black vizard mask as had been required of him, but the man's eyes followed him, as though learning by heart the outline of his tall figure. The object of the Chevalier's journey was, of course, a secret from the prisoners, who merely felt its effects by having their meals served to them in their own tower; and when he returned after about a month's absence thought him looking harassed, aged, and so much out of humour that he could scarcely preserve his usual politeness.

The prisoners were so much separated from all intercourse with the dependants that they were entirely ignorant of the object of his absence from home. On these occasions they never left their tower and its court, and had no enlivenment save an occasional gift of dainties or message of inquiry from the ladies at Bellaise. These were brought by a handsome but slight, pale lad called Aimé de Selinville, a relative of the late Count, as he told them, who had come to act as a gentleman attendant upon the widowed countess. The brothers rather wondered how he was disposed of at the convent, but all there was so contrary to their preconceived notions that they acquiesced. The first time he arrived it was on a long, hot summer day, and he then brought them a cool iced sherbet in two separate flasks, that for Philip being mixed with wine, which was omitted for Berenger; and the youth stood lingering and watching, anxious, he said, to be able to tell his lady how the drinks were approved. Both were excellent, and to that effect the prisoners replied; but no sooner was the messenger gone than Berenger said smilingly, "That was a love potion, Phil."

"And you drank it!" cried Philip, in horror.

"I did not think of it till I saw how the boy's eyes were gazing curiously at me as I swallowed it. You look at me as curiously, Phil. Are you expecting it to work? Shall I be at the fair lady's feet next time we meet?"

"How can you defy it, Berry?"

"Nay, Phil; holy wedded love is not to be dispelled by a mountebank's decoction."

"But suppose it were poisonous, Berry, what can be done?" cried Philip, starting up in dismay.

"Then you would go home, Phil, and this would be over. But"—seeing his brother's terror—"there is no fear of that. She is not like to wish to poison me."

And the potion proved equally ineffective on mind and body, as indeed did all the manipulations exercised upon a little waxen image that was supposed to represent M. le Baron. Another figure was offered to Diane, in feminine form, with black beads for eyes and a black plaster for hair, which, when stuck full of pins and roasted before the fire, was to cause Eustacie to peak and pine correspondingly. But from this measure Diane shrank. If aught was done against her rival it must be by her father and brother, not by herself; and she would not feel herself directly injuring her little cousin, nor sinking herself below him whom she loved. Once his wife, she would be good for ever, held up by his strength.

Meantime Berenger had received a greater shock than she or her father understood in the looking over of some of the family parchments kept in store at the castle. The Chevalier, in showing them to him, had chiefly desired to glorify the family by demonstrating how its honours had been won, but Berenger was startled at finding that Nid-de-Merle had been, as it appeared to him, arbitrarily and unjustly declared to be forfeited by the Sieur de Bellaise, who had been

thrown into prison by Louis XI. for some demonstration in favour of the poor Duke de Berri, and granted to the favourite Ribaumont. The original grant was there, and to his surprise he found it was to male heirs—the male heirs alone of the direct line of the Ribaumont—to whom the grant was made. How, then, came it to Eustacie? The disposal had, with almost equal injustice, been changed by King Henry II. and the late Count de Ribaumont in favour of the little daughter whose union with the heir of the elder line was to conclude all family feuds. Only now did Berenger understand what his father had said on his death-bed of flagrant injustice committed in his days of darkness. He felt that he was reaping the reward of the injuries committed against the Chevalier and his son on behalf of the two unconscious children. He would willingly at once have given up all claim to the Nid-de-Merle estate—and he was now of age; two birthdays had passed in his captivity and brought him to years of discretion—but he had no more power than before to dispose of what was the property of Eustacie and her child; and the whole question of the validity of his marriage would be given up by his yielding even the posthumous claim that might have devolved on him in case of Eustacie's death. This would be giving up her honour, a thing impossible.

CHAPTER XXI

BEATING AGAINST THE BARS

"My horse is weary of the stall,
And I am sick of captive thrall."

Lady of the Lake.

AFTER the first examination of their prison, Berenger had had no thought of escape; he was then still weak and unenterprising. He had for many months lived in hopes of interference from home; and, besides, the likelihood that so English a party as his own would be quickly pursued and recaptured, where they did not know their road and had no passports, had deterred him lest they should fall into still straiter imprisonment. But he had since gained, in the course of his rides, and by observation from the top of the tower, a much fuller knowledge of the country. He knew the way to the Grange du Temple, and to the chief towns in the neighbourhood. Philip and Humfrey had both lost something of their intensely national look and speech, and, moreover, war having broken out again, there was hope of falling in with Huguenot partisans even nearer than at La Rochelle. But whether successful or not, some enterprise was absolutely needed to save Philip from his despondent apathy; and Berenger, who in these eighteen months had grown into the strength and vigour of manhood, felt as if he had force and power for almost any effort save this hopeless waiting.

He held council with Humfrey, who suggested that

it might be well to examine the vaults below the keep. He had a few days before, while going after some of the firewood, stored below the ground-floor chamber, observed a door, locked, but with such rusty iron hinges that they might possibly yield to vigorous efforts with a stone; and who could tell where the underground passages might come out?

Berenger eagerly seized the idea. Philip's mood of contradiction prompted him to pronounce it useless folly, and he vouchsafed no interest in the arrangements for securing light, by selecting all the bits of firewood fittest for torches, and saving all the oil possible from the two lamps they were allowed. The chief difficulty was that Guibert was not trusted, so that all had to be done out of his sight; and on the first day Berenger was obliged to make the exploration alone, since Humfrey was forced to engross Guibert in some occupation out of sight, and Philip had refused to have anything to do with it, or to be like a rat routing in the corners of his trap.

However, Berenger had only just ascertained that the iron-work was so entirely rusted away as to offer no impediment, when Philip came languidly roaming into the cellar, saying, "Here! I'll hold the torch! You'll be losing yourself in this wolf's mouth of a place if you go alone."

The investigation justified Philip's predictions of its uselessness. Nothing was detected but rats, and vaults, and cobwebs; it was cold, earthy, and damp; and when they thought they must have penetrated far beyond the precincts of the keep, they heard Humfrey's voice close to them, warning them that it was nearly dinner-time.

The next day brought them a more promising discovery, namely of a long straight passage, with a gleam of light at the end of it; and this for the first time

excited Philip's interest or curiosity. He would have hastened along it at once, but for the warning summons from Humfrey; and in the excitement of even this grain of interest, he ate more heartily at supper than he had done for weeks, and was afterwards more eager to prove to Berenger that night was the best time to pursue their researches.

And Berenger, when convinced that Guibert was sound asleep, thought so too, and accompanied by Humfrey, they descended into the passage. The light, of course, was no longer visible, but the form of the crypt, through which they now passed, was less antique than that under the keep, and it was plain they were beneath a later portion of the Castle. The gallery concluded in a wall, with a small barred, unglazed window, perfectly dark, so that Berenger, who alone could reach to the bottom of it, could not guess where it looked out.

"We must return by daylight; then, maybe, we may judge," sighed Philip.

"Hark!" exclaimed Berenger.

"Rats," said Philip.

"No—listen—a voice! Take care!" he added, in a lower tone, "we may be close on some of the servants."

But, much nearer than he expected, a voice on his right hand demanded, "Does any good Christian hear me?"

"Who is there?" exclaimed Philip.

"Ah! good sir, do I hear the voice of a companion in misery? Or, if you be free, would you but send tidings to my poor father?"

"It is a Norman accent!" cried Berenger. "Ah! ah! can it be poor Landry Osbert?"

"I am—I am that wretch. Oh, would that M. le Baron could know!"

"My dear, faithful foster-brother! They deceived

me," cried Berenger, in great agitation, as an absolute howl came from the other side of the wall: "M. le Baron come to this! Woe worth the day!" and Berenger with difficulty mitigated his affectionate servant's lamentations enough to learn from him how he had been seized almost at the gates of Bellaise, closely interrogated, deprived of the letter to Madame la Baronne, and thrown into this dungeon. The Chevalier, not an unmerciful man, according to the time, had probably meant to release him as soon as the marriage between his son and niece should have rendered it superfluous to detain this witness to Berenger's existence. There, then, the poor fellow had lain for three years, and his work during this weary time had been the scraping with a potsherd at the stone of his wall, and his pertinacious perseverance had succeeded in forming a hole just large enough to enable him to see the light of the torch carried by the gentlemen. On his side, he said, there was nothing but a strong iron door, and a heavily-barred window, looking, like that in the passage, into the fosse within the walled garden; but, on the other hand, if he could enlarge his hole sufficiently to creep through it, he could escape with them in case of their finding a subterranean outlet. The opening within his cell was, of course, much larger than the very small space he had made by loosening a stone towards the passage, but he was obliged always to build up each side of his burrow at the hours of his jailer's visit, lest his work should be detected, and to stamp the rubbish into his floor. But while they talked, Humfrey and Philip, with their knives, scraped so diligently that two more stones could be displaced; and, looking down the widening hole through the prodigious mass of wall, they could see a ghastly, ragged, long-bearded scarecrow, with an almost piteous expression of joy on his face, at once

again seeing familiar faces. And when, at his earnest entreaty, Berenger stood so as to allow his countenance to be as visible as the torch could make it through the "wall's-hole," the vault echoed with the poor fellow's delighted cry. "I am happy! M. le Baron is himself again. The assassin's cruel work is gone! Ah! thanks to the saints! Blessed be St. Lucie, it was not in vain that I entreated her!"

The torches were, however, waxing so low that the sight could not long be afforded poor Osbert; and, with a promise to return to him next day, the party returned to the upper air, where they warmed themselves over the fire, and held council over measures for the present relief of the captive. Berenger grieved that he had given him up so entirely for lost as to have made no exertions on his behalf, and declared his resolution of entreating that he might be allowed to enjoy comparative comfort with them in the keep. It was a risk, but the Chevalier might fairly suppose that the knowledge of Osbert's situation had oozed out through the servants, and gratitude and humanity alike impelled Berenger to run some risk for his foster-brother's sake. He was greatly touched at the poor fellow's devotion, and somewhat amused, though with an almost tearful smile at the joy with which he had proclaimed—what Berenger was quite unaware of, since the keep furnished no mirrors—the disappearance of his scars. "'Tis even so," said Philip, "though I never heeded it. You are as white from crown to beard as one of the statues at Paris; but the great red gash is a mere seam, save when yon old Satan angers you, and then it blushes for all the rest of your face."

"And the cheek-wound is hidden, I suppose," said Berenger, feeling under the long fair, moustache and the beard, which was developing into respectable proportions.

"Hidden? ay, entirely. No one would think your bald crown had only twenty-one years over it; but you are a personable fellow still, quite enough to please Daphné," said Philip.

"Pshaw!" replied Berenger, pleased nevertheless to hear the shadow of a jest again from Philip.

It was quite true. These months of quiescence—enforced though they were—had given his health and constitution time to rally after the terrible shock they had sustained. The severe bleedings had, indeed, rendered his complexion perfectly colourless; but there was something in this, as well as in the height which the loss of hair gave his brow, which, added to the depth and loftiness of countenance that this long period of patience and resolution had impressed on his naturally fine features, without taking away that open candour that had first attracted Diane when he was a rosy lad. His frame had strengthened at the same time, and assumed the proportions of manhood; so that, instead of being the overgrown maypole that Narcisse used to sneer at, he was now broad-shouldered and robust, exceedingly powerful, and so well made that his height, upwards of six feet, was scarcely observed, except by comparison with the rest of the world.

And his character had not stood still. He had first come to Paris a good, honest, docile, though high-spirited boy: and though manly affections, cares, and sorrows had been thrust on him, he had met them like the boy that he was, hardly conscious how deep they went. Then had come the long dream of physical suffering, with only one thought pertinaciously held throughout—that of constancy to his lost wife; and from this he had only thoroughly awakened in his captivity, the resolution still holding fast, but with more of reflection and principle, less of mere instinct,

than when his powers were lost or distracted in the effort of constant endurance of pain and weakness. The charge of Philip, the endeavour both of educating him and keeping up his spirits, as well as the controversy with Père Bonami, had been no insignificant parts of the discipline of these months; and, little as the Chevalier had intended it, he had trained his young kinsman into a far more substantial and perilous adversary, both in body and mind, than when he had caged him in his castle of the Blackbird's Nest.

CHAPTER XXII

THE ENEMY IN PRESENCE

"Then came and looked him in the face
An angel beautiful and bright,
And then he knew it was a fiend,
That miserable knight."

COLERIDGE.

"**F**ATHER, dear father, what is it? What makes you look so ill, so haggard?" cried Diane de Selinville, when summoned the next morning to meet her father in the parlour of the convent.

"Ah, child! see here. Your brother will have us make an end of it. He has found her."

"Eustacie! Ah, and where?"

"That he will not say, but see here. This is all his billet tells me: 'The hare who has doubled so long is traced to her form. My dogs are on her, and in a week's time she will be ours. I request you, sir, to send me a good purse of crowns to reward my huntsmen; and in the meantime—one way or the other—that pet of my sister's must be disposed of. Kept too long, these beasts always become savage. Either let him be presented to the royal menagerie, or there is a still surer way.'"

"And that is all he says!" exclaimed Diane.

"All! He was always cautious. He mentions no names. And now, child, what is to be done? To give him up to the King is, at the best, life-long imprisonment, yet, if he were still here when my son returns—Alas! alas! child, I have been ruined body and soul

between you! How could you make me send after and imprison him? It was a mere assassination!" and the old man beat his head with grief and perplexity.

"Father!" cried Diane, tearfully, "I cannot see you thus. We meant it for the best. We shall yet save him."

"Save him! Ah, daughter, I tossed all night long thinking how to save him, so strong, so noble, so firm, so patient, so good even to the old man who has destroyed his hope—his life! Ah! I have thought till my brain whirls."

"Poor father! I knew you would love him," said Diane, tenderly. "Ah! we will save him yet. He shall be the best of sons to you. Look, it is only to tell him that she whom he calls his wife is already in my brother's hands, wedded to him."

"Daughter,"—and he pushed back his grey hair with a weary distressed gesture—"I am tired of wiles; I am old; I can carry them out no longer."

"But this is very simple; it may already be true—at least it will soon be true. Only tell him that she is my brother's wife. Then will his generosity awaken, then will he see that to persist in the validity of his marriage would be misery, dishonour to her, then——"

"Child, you know not how hard he is in his sense of right. Even for his brother's sake he would not give way an inch, and the boy was as obstinate as he!"

"Ah! but this comes nearer. He will be stung; his generosity will be piqued. He will see that the kindest thing he can do will be to nullify his claim, and the child——"

The Chevalier groaned, struck his brow with his fist, and muttered, "That will concern no one—that has been provided for. Ah! ah! children, if I lose my own soul for you, you——"

"Father, my sweet father, say not these cruel things.

Did not the Queen's confessor tell us that all means were lawful that brought a soul to the Church? and here are two."

"Two! Why, the youth's heresy is part of his point of honour. Child, child, the two will be murdered in my very house, and the guilt will be on my soul."

"No, father! We will—we will save him. See, only tell him this."

"This—what? My brain is confused. I have thought long—long."

"Only this, father, dear father. You shall not be tormented any more, if only you will tell him that my brother has made Eustacie his wife, then will I do all the rest."

Diane coaxed, soothed, and encouraged her father by her caresses, till he mounted his mule to return to the castle at dinner-time, and she promised to come early in the afternoon to follow up the stroke he was to give. She had never seen him falter before—he had followed out his policy with a clear head and unsparing hand—but now that Berenger's character was better known to him, and the crisis long-delayed had come so suddenly before his eyes, his whole powers seemed to reel under the alternative.

The dinner-bell clanged as he arrived at the castle, and the prisoners were marched into the hall, both intent upon making their request on Osbert's behalf, and therefore as impatient for the conclusion of the meal, and the absence of the servants, as was their host. His hands trembled so much that Berenger was obliged to carve for him; he made the merest feint of eating; and now and then raised his hand to his head as if to bring back scattered ideas.

The last servant quitted the room, when Berenger perceived that the old man was hardly in a state to attend to his request, and yet the miserable frost-

bitten state of poor Landry seemed to compel him to speak.

"Sir," he began, "you could do me a great kindness."

The Chevalier looked up at him with glassy eyes.

"My son," he said, with an effort, "I also had something to say. Ah! let me think. I have had enough. Call my daughter," he added, feeling helplessly with his hands, so that Berenger started up in alarm, and received him in his arms just in time to prevent his sinking to the floor senseless.

"It is a stroke," exclaimed Berenger. "Call, Phil! Send the gendarmes."

The gendarmes might be used to the sight of death of their own causing, but they had a horror of that which came by Nature's hand. The purple face and loud gasps of the stricken man terrified them out of their senses. "*C'est un coup*," was the cry, and they went clattering off to the servants. These, all men but one old crone, came in a mass to the door, looked in, beheld their master rigid and prostrate on the floor, supported by the prisoner, and with fresh shrieks about "Mesdames! a priest! a doctor!" away they rushed. The two brothers were not in much less consternation, only they retained their senses. Berenger loosened the ruff and doublet, and bade Philip practise that art of letting blood which he had learnt for his benefit. When Madame de Selinville and her aunt, with their escort, having been met half-way from Bellaïse, arrived sooner than could have been expected, they found every door open from hall to entrance gateway, not a person keeping watch, and the old man lying deathlike upon cushions in the hall, Philip bandaging his arm, and Berenger rubbing his temples with wine and the hottest spices on the table. "He is better—he is alive," said Berenger, as they entered; and as both ladies would have fallen

on him with shrieks and sobs, he bade them listen, assured them that the only chance of life was in immediate care, and entreated that bedding might be brought down, and strong essences fetched to apply to the nose and temples. They obeyed, and brought the servants to obey; and by this time the priest and the sister infirmarer had arrived from the convent, he had opened his eyes, and, as he saw Berenger, tried to murmur something that sounded like "*Mon fils.*"

"He lives!—he speaks!—he can receive the sacraments!" was the immediate exclamation; and as preparations began to be made, the brothers saw that their presence was no longer needed, and returned to their own tower.

"So, sir," said the gendarme sergeant, as they walked down the passage, "you did not seize the moment for escape."

"I never thought of it," said Berenger.

"I hope, sir, you will not be the worse for it," said the sergeant. "An honourable gentleman you have ever proved yourself to me, and I will bear testimony that you did the poor old gentleman no hurt; but nobles will have it their own way, and pay little heed to a poor soldier."

"What do you mean, friend?"

"Why, you see, sir, it is unlucky that you two happened to be alone with M. le Chevalier. No one can tell what may be said when they seek an occasion against a person."

To the brothers, however this suggestion sounded so horrible and unnatural, that they threw it from them. They applied themselves at every moment possible to enlarging Osbert's hole, and seeking an outlet from the dungeon; but this they had not been able to discover, and it was necessary to be constantly on their guard in visiting the vaults, lest their absence

from their apartment should be detected. They believed that if Narcisse arrived at the castle, they should find in him a far less gentle jailer than the poor old man, for whose state their kindly young hearts could not but grieve.

They heard that he had recovered consciousness enough to have made a sort of confession; and Père Bonami brought them his formal request, as a dying man, for their pardon for all the injuries he had done them; but his speech was too much affected for any specification of what these were. The first thing they heard in early morning was that, in the course of the night, he had breathed his last; and all day the bells of all the churches round were answering one another with the slow, swinging, melancholy notes of the knell.

In the early twilight, Père Bonami brought a message that Madame de Selinville requested M. le Baron to come and speak with her, and he was accordingly conducted, with the gendarme behind him, to a small chamber opening into the hall—the same where the incantations of the Italian pedlar had been played off before Philip and Diane. The gendarme remained outside the door by which they entered the little dark room, only lighted by one little lamp.

"Here, daughter," said the priest, "is your cousin. He can answer the questions you have so much at heart;" and with these words Père Bonami passed beneath the black curtain that covered the entrance into the hall, admitting as he raised it for a moment a flood of pure light from the wax tapers, and allowing the cadence of the chanting of the priests to fall on the ear.

At first Berenger was scarcely able to discern the pale face that looked as if tears were all dried up, and even before his eyes had clearly perceived

her in the gloom, she was standing before him with clasped hands, demanding, in a hoarse, breathless whisper, "Had he said anything to you?"

"Anything? No, cousin," said Berenger, in a kind tone. "He had seemed suffering and oppressed all dinner-time, and when the servants left us, he murmured a few confused words, then sank."

"Ah, ah, he spoke it not! Thank heaven! Ah! it is a load gone. Then neither will I speak it," sighed Diane, half aloud. "Ah! cousin, he loved you."

"He often was kind to us," said Berenger, impelled to speak as tenderly as he could of the enemy, who had certainly tortured him, but as if he loved him.

"He bade us save you," said Diane, her eyes shining with strange wild light in the gloom. "He laid it on my aunt and me to save you; you must let us. It must be done before my brother comes," she added, in hurried accents. "The messengers are gone; he may be here any moment. He must find you in the chapel—as—as my betrothed!"

"And you sent for me here to tempt me—close to such a chamber as that?" demanded Berenger, his gentleness becoming sternness, as much with his own worse self as with her.

"Listen. Ah! it is the only way. Listen, cousin. Do you know what killed my father? It was my brother's letter saying things must be brought to an end: either you must be given up to the King, or worse—worse. And now, without him to stand between you and my brother, you are lost. Oh! take pity on his poor soul that has left his body, and bring not your blood on his head."

"Nay," said Berenger, "if he repented, the after consequences to me will have no effect on him now."

"Have pity then on yourself—on your brother."

"I have," said Berenger. "He had rather die with me than see me a traitor."

"And least of all," she exclaimed, with choking grief, "have you compassion on me!—on me who have lost the only one who felt for me—on me who have loved you with every fibre of my heart—on me who have lived on the music of your hardest, coldest word—on me who would lay my life, my honour, in the dust for one grateful glance from you—and whom you condemn to the anguish of—your death! Aye, and for what? For the mere shadow of a little girl, who had no force to love you, of whom you know nothing—nothing! Oh! are you a crystal rock or are you a man? See, I kneel to you to save yourself and me."

There were hot tears dropping from Berenger's eyes as he caught Diane's hand, and held it forcibly to prevent her thus abasing herself. Her wild words and gestures thrilled him in every pulse and wrung his heart, and it was with a stifled, agitated voice that he said—

"God help you and me both, Diane! To do what you ask would—would be no saving of either. Nay, if you will kneel," as she struggled with him, "let it be to Him who alone can bring us through;" and releasing her hand, he dropped on his knees by her side, and covered his face with his hands, in an earnest supplication that the spirit of resistance which he almost felt slipping from him might be renewed. The action hushed and silenced her, and as he rose he spoke no other word, but silently drew back so much of the curtain that he could see into the hall, where the dead man still lay uncoffined upon the bed where his own hands had laid him, and the low, sweet requiem of kneeling priests floated round him. Rest, rest, and calm they breathed into one sorely tried living soul,

and the perturbed heart was quelled by the sense how short the passage was to the world where captivity and longing would be ended. He beckoned to Père Bonami to return to Diane, and then, protected by his presence from any further demonstrations, kissed her hand and left her.

He told Philip as little as possible of this interview, but his brother remarked how much time he spent over the Psalms that evening.

The next day the brothers saw from their upper window the arrival of Narcisse, or, as he had called himself for the last three years, the Marquis de Nid-de-Merle, with many attendant gentlemen, and a band of fifty or sixty gendarmes. The court was filled with their horses, and rang with their calls for refreshment. And the captives judged it wise to remain in their upper room in case they should be called for.

They were proved to have been wise in so doing; for about an hour after their arrival there was a great clanging of steel boots, and Narcisse de Ribaumont, followed by a portly, heavily-armed gentleman, wearing a scarf of office, by two of the servants, and by two gendarmes, entered the room. It was the first time the cousins had met since *le baiser d'Eustacie* had been hissed into Berenger's ear. Narcisse looked older, sallower, and more worn than at that time; and Philip, seeing his enemy for the first time, contrasted him with the stately presence of Berenger, and felt as if a rat were strangling a noble steed.

Each young man punctiliously removed his hat, and Nid-de-Merle, without deigning further salutation, addressed his companion. "Sir, you are here on the part of the King, and to you I deliver up these prisoners who, having been detained here on a charge of carrying on a treasonable correspondence, and protected by my father out of consideration for the family, have

requited his goodness by an attempt to strangle him, which has caused his death."

Philip actually made a leap of indignation; Berenger, better prepared, said to the officer, "Sir, I am happy to be placed in charge of a King's servant, who will no doubt see justice done, and shelter us from the private malice that could alone devise so monstrous an accusation. We are ready to clear ourselves upon oath over the corpse, and all the household and our own guards can bear witness."

"The witnesses are here," said Narcisse, pointing to the servants, ill-looking men, who immediately began to depose to having found their master purple-faced and struggling in the hands of the two young men, who had been left alone with him after dinner.

Berenger felt that there was little use in self-defence. It was a fabrication the more easily to secure his cousin's purpose of destroying him, and his best hope lay in passing into the hands of persons who were less directly interested in his ruin. He drew himself up to his full height, saying, "If there be justice in France, our innocence will be proved. I demand, sir, that you examine the abbess, the priest, the steward, the sergeant of gendarmes: they are impartial witnesses, and will serve the King's justice, if justice be his purpose. Or, if this be but M. de Nid-de-Merle's way of completing the work he left unfinished four years ago, I am ready. Only let my brother go free. He is heir to nothing here."

"Enough, sir. Words against the King's justice will be reckoned against you," said the officer. "I shall do myself the honour of attending the funeral the day after to-morrow, and then I shall convey you to Tours, to answer for this deed at your leisure. Monsieur le Marquis, are the prisoners secure here, or would you have them *gardés à vue*."

"No need for that," said Narcisse, lightly; "had there been any exit they would have found it long ago. Your good fellows outside the door keep them safe enough. M. le Baron de Ribeaumont, I have the honour to wish you a good morning."

Berenger returned his bow with one full of defiance, and the door was again locked upon the prisoners; while Philip exclaimed, "The cowardly villain, Berry; is it a hanging matter?"

"Not for noble blood," said Berenger. "We are more likely to be brought to no trial, but to lie prisoners for life;" then, as Philip grew white and shivered with a sick horror, he added bravely, "But they shall not have us, Philip. We know the vaults well enough to play at hide and seek with them there, and even if we find no egress we may hold out till they think us fled and leave open the doors!"

Philip's face lighted up again, and they did their best by way of preparation, collecting wood for torches, and putting aside food at their meals. It was a very forlorn hope, but the occupation it caused was effectual in keeping up Philip's spirits, and saving him from despondency.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PEDLAR'S PREDICTION

"But if ne'er so close you wall him,
Do the best that you may;
Blind Love, if so you call him,
Will find out his way."

Old Song.

"**T**OO late," muttered Berenger to himself, as he stood by the fire in his prison-chamber. Humfrey and Philip were busy in the vaults, and he was taking his turn in waiting in the sitting-room to disarm suspicion. "It is too late now, and I thank God that so it is."

"Do you indeed, M. le Baron," said a low voice close beside him; and, as he turned in haste, he beheld, at the foot of the turret-stair, the youth Aimé de Selinville, holding a dark lantern in his hand, and veiling its light.

"Ha!" and he started to his feet. "Whence come you?"

"From my lady," was the youth's answer. "She has sent me to ask whether you persist in what you replied to her the other day. For if not, she bids me say that it is not too late."

"And if I do persevere?"

"Then—ah! what do I know? Who can tell how far malice can go? And there are towers and bastilles where hope never enters. Moreover, your researches underground are known."

"Sir," said Berenger, the heart sinking quelled by the effort of resistance, "Madame de Selinville has my

answer—I must take the consequences. Tell her, if she truly wishes me well, the honourable way of saving us would be to let our English friends know what has befallen us.”

“You forget, M. le Baron, even if she could proclaim the dishonour of her family, interference from a foreign power might only lead to a surer mode of removing you,” said Aimé, lowering his voice and shuddering.

“Even so, I should thank her. Then would the bitterest pang be taken away. Those at our home would not deem us faithless recreants.”

“Thank her!” murmured the lad in an inward voice. “Very well, sir, I will carry her your decision. It is your final one. Disgrace, prison, death—rather than freedom, love, wealth!”

“The semblance of dishonour rather than the reality!” said Berenger, firmly.

The light-footed page disappeared, and in a few moments a very different tread came up from below, and Philip appeared.

“What is it, Berry? Methought I heard a voice.”

“Forgive me, brother,” said Berenger, holding out his hand; “I have thrown away another offer.”

“Tush, the thing to pardon would be having accepted one. I only wish they would leave us in peace! What was it this time?”

“A message through young Selinville. Strange, to trust her secrets to that lad. But hush, here he is again, much sooner than I thought. What, sir, have you been with your Lady again?”

“Yes, sir,” the youth said, with a trembling voice, and Berenger saw that his eyes were red with weeping; “she bids me tell you that she yields. She will save you even while you hate and despise her! There is only one thing——”

“And what is that?”

“You must encumber yourself with the poor Aimé. You must let me serve you instead of her. Listen, sir, it cannot be otherwise.” Then with a brisker, more eager voice, he continued: “Monsieur knows that the family burial-place is Bellaise? Well, to-morrow, at ten o’clock, all the household, all the neighbourhood, will come and sprinkle holy water on the bier. The first requiem will be sung, and then will all repair to the convent. There will be the funeral mass, the banquet, the dole. Every creature in the castle—nay, in all the neighbourhood for twenty miles round—will be at the convent, for the Abbess has given out that the alms are to be double, and the bread of wheat. Not a soul will remain here, save the two gendarmes on guard at that door, and the poor Aimé, whom no one will miss, even if any person could be distinguished in their black cloaks. Madame le Comtesse has given him this key, which opens a door on the upper floor of the keep, unknown to the guards, who, for that matter, shall have a good tankard of spiced wine to console and occupy them. Then is the way clear to the castle-court, which is not overlooked by their window, the horses are in the stables, and we are off—that is, if M. le Baron will save a poor youth from the wrath of M. de Nid-de-Merle.”

“You are an honest fellow!” cried Philip, shaking him vehemently by the hand. “You shall go with us to England, and we will make a brave man of you.”

“We shall owe you our lives,” said Berenger, warmly, “and be ever bound to you. Tell your lady that *this* is magnanimity; that now I truly thank her as our preserver, and shall bless her all the days of the life she gives us. But my servants?”

“Guibert is a traitor,” said Aimé; “he has been so ever since you were at Paris. Breathe no word to

him; but he, as a Catholic, shall be invited to the funeral. Your stout Englishman should by all means be with us."

"My Norman, also," added Berenger—"my dear foster-brother, who has languished in the dungeon for three years;" and when the explanation had been made, Aimé assented, though half-unwillingly, to the necessity, and presently quitted them to bear back their answer to his lady. Philip shook his hand violently again, patted him on the back, so as almost to take away his breath, and bade him never fear, they would be sworn brothers to him for ever; and then threw up his hat into the air, and was so near astonishing the donjon walls with a British hurrah, that Berenger had to put his hand over his mouth and strangle the shout in his very throat.

The chief of that night was spent in enlarging the hole in Osbert's wall, so as to admit of his creeping through it; and they also prepared their small baggage for departure. Their stock of money, though some had been spent on renewing their clothes, and some in needful gratuities to the servants and gendarmes, was sufficient for present needs, and they intended to wear their ordinary dress. They were unlikely to meet any of the peasants in the neighbourhood; and, indeed, Berenger had so constantly ridden out in his black mask, that its absence, now that his scars were gone, was as complete a change as could be effected in one whose height was so unusual.

"There begins the knell," said Philip, standing at the window. "It's our joy-bell, Berry! Every clang seems to me to say, 'Home! home! home!'"

"For you, Phil," said Berenger; "but I must be satisfied of Eustacie's fate first. I shall go first to Nissard—whither we were bound when we were seized—then to La Rochelle, whence you may——"

"No more of that," burst out Philip. "What! would you have me leave you now, after all we have gone through together? Not that you will find her. I don't want to vex you, brother, on such a day as this, but yon conjurer's words are coming true in the other matter."

"How? What mean you, Phil?"

"What's the meaning of Aimé?" asked Philip. Even I am French scholar enough for that. And who sends him?"

Meantime the court was already filling with swarms of persons of every rank and degree, but several anxious hours had passed before the procession was marshalled; and friars and monks, black, white, and grey—priests in rich robes and tall caps—black-cloaked gentlemen and men-at-arms—all bearing huge wax tapers—and peasants and beggars of every conceivable aspect—filed out of the court, bearing with them the richly-emblazoned bier of the noble and puissant knight, the Beausire Charles Eustache de Ribauumont Nid-de-Merle, his son walking behind in a long black mantle, and all who counted kindred or friendship following two and two; then all the servants, every one who properly belonged to the castle, were counted out by the brothers from their windows, and Guibert among them.

"Messieurs," a low, anxious voice sounded in the room.

"We will only fetch Osbert."

It was a terrible only, as precious moments slipped away before there appeared in the lower chamber Berenger and Humfrey, dragging between them a squalid wretch, with a skin like stained parchment over a skeleton, tangled hair and beard, staring bewildered eyes, and fragments of garments, all dirt and rags.

"Leave me, leave me, dear master," said the object, stretching his whole person towards the fire as they let him sink down before it. "You would but ruin yourself."

"It is madness to take him," said Aimé, impatiently.

"I go not without him," said Berenger. "Give me the soup, Philip."

Some soup and wine had been placed by the fire, and likewise a shirt and a suit of Humfrey's clothes were spread before it. Aimé burst out into the yard, absolutely weeping with impatience, when, unheeding all his remonstrances, his three companions applied themselves to feeding, rubbing, and warming Osbert, and assuring him that the pains in his limbs would pass away with warmth and exercise. He had been valiant of heart in his dungeon; but his sudden plunge into upper air was like rising from the grave, and brought on all the effects of his dreary captivity, of which he had hardly been sensible when he had first listened to the voice of hope.

Dazzled, crippled, helpless, it seemed almost impossible that he should share the flight, but Berenger remained resolute; and when Aimé returned from his fourth frantic promenade, he was told that all was ready.

But for the strength of Berenger and Humfrey the poor fellow could never have been carried up and up, nearly to the top of the keep, then along a narrow gallery, then down again even to the castle-hall, now empty, though with the candlesticks still around where the bier had been. Aimé knelt for a moment where the head had been, hiding his face; Osbert rested in a chair; and Philip looked wistfully up at his own sword hung over the chimney.

"Resume your swords, Messieurs," said Aimé, ob-

serving him; "Madame desires it; and take pistols also."

They gladly obeyed; and when, after this short delay, they proceeded, Osbert moved somewhat less painfully, but when they arrived at the stable only four horses stood there.

"Ah! this is miserable!" cried Aimé, passionately, "he ruins all my arrangements."

"Leave me," again entreated Landry. "Once outside, I can act the beggar and cripple, and get back to Normandy."

"Better leave me," said Humfrey; "they cannot keep me when you are out of their clutches."

"Help me, Humfrey," said Berenger, beginning to lift his foster-brother to the saddle but there the poor man wavered, cried out that his head swam, and he could not keep his seat, entreating almost in agony to be taken down.

"Lean on me," said Berenger, putting his arms round him. "There! you will be able to get to the Grange du Temple, where you will be in safe shelter."

"Sir, sir," cried Aimé, ready to tear his hair, "this is ruin! My lady meant you to make all speed to La Rochelle and there embark, and this is the contrary way!"

"That cannot be helped," said Berenger; "it is the only safe place for my foster-brother."

Aimé, with childish petulance, muttered something about ingratitude in crossing his lady's plans; but, as no one attended to him, he proceeded to unfasten his horse, and then exclaimed, half-crying, "Will no one help me?"

"Not able to saddle a horse! a pretty fellow for a cavalier!" exclaimed Philip, assisting, however, and in a few minutes they were all issuing from a low



"BERENGER, WALKING WITH SWIFT STRIDES, SUPPORTING
OSBERT ON HIS HORSE"

side gate, and looking back with bounding hearts at the drooping banner on the keep of Nid-de-Merle.

Only young Aimé went with bowed head and drooping look, as though pouting, and Berenger, putting Osbert's bridle into Humfrey's hand, stepped up to him, saying, "Hark you, M. de Selinville, I am sorry if we seemed to neglect you. We owe you and your lady all gratitude, but I must be the judge of my own duty, and you can only be with me if you conform."

The youth seemed to be devouring his tears, but only said, "I was vexed to see my lady's plan marred, and your chance thrown away."

"Of that I must judge," said Berenger.

They were in a by-lane, perfectly solitary. The whole country was at the funeral. Through the frosty air there came an occasional hum or murmur from Bellaise, or the tinkle of a cow-bell in the fields, but no human being was visible. It was certain, however, that the Rotrous, being Huguenots, and no vassals of Nid-de-Merle, would not be at the obsequies; and Berenger, walking with swift strides, supporting Osbert on his horse, continued to cheer him with promises of rest and relief there, and listened to no entreaties from Philip or Humfrey to take one of their horses. Had not Osbert borne him on his shoulders through the butchery at Paris, and endured three years of dungeon for his sake?

As for Philip, the slow pace of their ride was all insufficient for his glee. He made his horse caracole at every level space, till Berenger reminded him that they might have far to ride that night, and even then he was constantly breaking into attempts at shouting and whistling as often repressed, and springing up in his stirrups to look over the high hedges.

The Grange was so well concealed in its wooded

ravine, that only, when close upon the gate, the party became aware that this farm-yard, usually so solitary, formed an exception to the general desertion of the country. There was a jingle and a stamp of horses in the court, which could hardly be daylight echoes of the Templars. Berenger feared that the Guisards might have descended upon Rotrou, and was stepping forward to reconnoitre, while young De Selinville, trembling, besought him not to run into danger, but to turn and hasten to La Rochelle. By this time, however, the party had been espied by two soldiers stationed at the gate, but not before Berenger had had time to remark that they did not wear either the gold *fleur de lys* like his late guards, or the white cross of Lorraine; nor had they the strange air of gay ferocity usual with the King's mercenaries. And almost by instinct, at a venture, he made the old Huguenot sign he had learnt from his father, and answered, "For God and the Religion."

The counter-sign was returned. "Béarn and Bourbon is the word to-day, comrade," replied the sentinel. "*Eh quoi!* have you had an encounter, that you bring a wounded man?"

"Not wounded, but nearly dead in a Guisard prison," said Berenger, with an unspeakable sense of relief and security, as the sentries admitted them into the large walled court, where horses were eating hay, being watered and rubbed down; soldiers snatching a hasty meal in corners; gentlemen in clanking breastplates coming in and out of the house, evidently taking orders from a young man in a grey and silver suit, whose brown eagle face, thin cheeks, arched nose, and black eyes of keenest fire, struck Berenger at once with a sense of recognition as well as of being under a glance that seemed to search out everybody and everything at once.

"More friends!" and the tone again recalled a flood of recollections. "I thank and welcome you. What! You have met the enemy—where is he?"

"My servant is not wounded, Sire," said Berenger, removing his hat and bending low. "This is the effect of long captivity. We have but just escaped."

"Then we are in the same case! Pardon me, sir, I have seen you before, but for once I am at fault."

"When I call myself De Ribaumont, your Grace will not wonder."

"The dead alive! If I mistake not, it was in the Inferno itself that we last met! But we have broken through the gates at last! I remember poor King Charles was delighted to hear that you lived! But where have you been a captive?"

"At Nid-de-Merle, Sire; my kinsmen accused me of treason in order to hinder my search for my wife. We escaped even now during the funeral of the Chevalier."

"By favour of which we are making our way to Parthenay unsuspected, though, by my faith, we gather so like a snowball, that we could be a match for a few hundreds of Guisards. Who is with you, M. de Ribaumont?"

"Let me present to your Majesty my English brother, Philip Thistlewood," said Berenger, drawing the lad forward, making due obeisance, though entirely ignorant who was the plainly-dressed, travel soiled stranger, so evidently a born lord of men.

"An Englishman is ever welcome," was his gracious reception.

"And," added Berenger, "let me also present the young De Selinville, to whom I owe my escape. Where is he, Philip?"

He seemed to be busy with the horses, and Berenger could not catch his eye.

"Selinville! I thought that good Huguenot house was extinct."

"This is a relation of the late Count de Selinville, my cousin's husband, Sire. He arranged my evasion, and would be in danger at Nid-de-Merle. Call him, Philip."

Before this was done, however, the King's attention was otherwise claimed, and turning to one of his gentlemen he said, "Here, D'Aubigné, I present to you an acquaintance made in Tartarus. See to his entertainment ere we start for Parthenay."

Agrippa d'Aubigné, still young, but grave and serious looking, greeted M. de Ribeaumont as men meet in hours when common interests make rapid friendships; and from him Berenger learnt, in a few words, that the King of Navarre's eyes had been opened at last to the treachery of the court, and his own dishonourable bondage. During a feverish attack, one night when D'Aubigné and D'Armagnac were sitting up with him, his resolution was taken; and on the first hunting day after his recovery, he, with these two, the Baron de Rosny and about thirty more of his suite, had galloped away, and had joined the Monsieur and the Prince of Condé at Alençon. He had abjured the Catholic faith, declared that nothing except ropes should bring him back to Paris, and that he left there the mass and his wife—the first he could dispense with, the last he meant to have; and he was now on his way to Parthenay to meet his sister, whom he had sent Rosny to demand. By the time Berenger had heard this, he had succeeded in finding honest Rotrou, who was in a state of great triumph, and readily undertook to give Osbert shelter, and as soon as he should have recovered to send him to head-quarters with some young men who he knew would take the field as soon as they learnt that the King of Navarre had set up his

standard. Even the inroads made into the good farmer's stores did not abate his satisfaction in entertaining the prime hope of the Huguenot cause; but Berenger advanced as large a sum as he durst out of his purse, under pretext of the maintenance of Osbert during his stay at the Grange. He examined Rotrou upon his subsequent knowledge of Isaac Gardon and Eustacie, but nothing had been heard of them since their departure, now nearly three three years back, except a dim rumour that they had been seen at the Synod of Montauban.

"Well, my friend," said Philip, when about to remount, "this will do rather better than a headlong gallop to Rochelle with Nid-de-Merle at our heels."

"If M. le Baron is safe, it is well," said Aimé shortly.

"Is Selinville there?" said Berenger, coming up. "Here, let me take you to the King of Navarre: he knew your family in Languedoc."

"No, no," petulantly returned the boy. "What am I that he should notice me? It is M. de Ribaumont whom I follow, not him or his cause."

"Boy," said Berenger, dismayed, "remember, I have answered for you."

"I am no traitor," proudly answered the strange boy, and Berenger was forced to be thus satisfied, though intending to watch him closely.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE SANDS OF OLONNE

"Is it the dew of night
That on her glowing cheek
Shines in the moonbeam?—Oh, she weeps, she weeps,
And the good angel that abandoned her
At her hell baptism, by her tears drawn down
Resumes his charge . . . and the hope
Of pardon and salvation rose
As now she understood
Thy lying prophecy of truth."

SOUTHEY.

"**M.** DE RIBAUMONT," said Henry of Navarre, as he stood before the fire after supper at Parthenay, "I have been thinking what commission I could give you proportioned to your rank and influence."

"Thanks to your Grace, that inquiry is soon answered. I am a beggar here. Even my paternal estate in Normandy is in the hands of my cousin."

"You have wrongs," said Henry, "and wrongs are sometimes better than possessions in a party like ours."

Berenger seized the opening to explain his position, and mention that his only present desire was for permission, in the first place, to send a letter to England by the messenger whom the King was despatching to Elizabeth, in tolerable security of her secret countenance; and, secondly, to ride to Nissard to examine into the story he had previously heeded so little, of the old man and his daughter rescued from the waves the day before La Sablerie was taken.

"If Pluto relented, my dear Orpheus, surely Navarre may," said Henry good-humouredly; "only may the priest not be more adamantine than Minos. Where lies Nissard? On the Sables d'Olonne? Then you may go thither with safety while we lie here, and I shall wait for my sister, or for news of her."

So Berenger arranged for an early start on the morrow; and young Selinville listened with a frown, and strange look in his dark eyes. "You go not to England?" he said.

"Not yet," said Berenger.

"This was not what my lady expected," he muttered; but though Berenger silenced him by a stern look, he took the first opportunity of asking Philip if it would not be far wiser for his brother to place himself in safety in England.

"Wiser, but less honest," said Philip.

"He who has lost all here, who has incurred his grandfather's anger," pursued Aimé, "were he not wiser to make his peace with his friends in England?"

"His friends in England would not like him the better for deserting his poor wife's cause," said Philip. "I advise you to hold your tongue, and not meddle or make."

Aimé subsided, and Philip detected something like tears. He had still much of rude English boyhood about him, and he laughed roughly. "A fine fellow, to weep at a word! Hie thee back to feed my lady's lap-dog, 'tis all thou art fit for."

"There spoke English gratitude," said Aimé, with a toss of the head and flash of the eye.

Philip despised him the more for casting up his obligations, but had no retort to make. He had an idea of making a man of young Selinville, and his notion of the process had something of the bullying tendency of English youth towards the poor-spirited

or cowardly. He ordered the boy roughly, teasing him for his ignorance of manly exercises, tried to cure his helplessness by increasing his difficulties, and viewed his fatigue as affectation or effeminacy. Berenger interfered now and then to guard the poor boy from a horse-jest or practical joke, but he too felt that Aimé was a great incumbrance, hopelessly cowardly, fanciful, and petulant; and he was sometimes driven to speak to him with severity, verging on contempt, in hopes of rousing a sense of shame.

The timidity, so unusual and inexplicable in a youth of eighteen or twenty, showed itself irrepressibly at the Sands of Olonne. These were not misty, as on Berenger's former journey. Nissard steeple was soon in sight, and the guide who joined them on a rough pony had no doubt that there would be ample time to cross before high water. There was, however, some delay, for the winter rains had brought down a good many streams of fresh water, and the sands were heavy and wet, so that their horses proceeded slowly, and the rush and dash of the waves proclaimed that the flow of the tide had begun. To the two brothers the break and sweep was a home-sound, speaking of freshness and freedom, and the salt breeze and spray carried with them life and ecstasy. Philip kept as near the incoming waves as his inland-bred horse would endure, and sang, shouted, and hallooed to them as welcome as English waves; but Aimé de Selinville had never even beheld the sea before: and even when the tide was still in the distance, was filled with nervous terror as each rushing fall sounded nearer; and, when the line of white foamy crests became more plainly visible, he was impelled to hurry on towards the steeple so fast that the guide shouted to him that he would only bury himself in a quicksand.

"But," said he, white with alarm, and his teeth

chattering, "how can we creep with those dreadful waves advancing upon us to drown us?"

Berenger silenced Philip's rude laugh, and was beginning to explain that the speed of the waves could always be calculated by an experienced inhabitant; and his voice had seemed to pacify Aimé a little, when the spreading water in front of a broken wave flowed up to his horse's feet, again rendering him nearly frantic. "Let us go back!" he wildly entreated, turning his horse; but Berenger caught his bridle saying, "That would be truly death. Boy, unless you would be scorned, restrain your folly. Nothing else imperils us."

Here, however, the guide interposed, saying that it had become too late to pursue their course along the curve of the shore, but they must at once cut straight across, which he had intended to avoid, because of the greater depth of a small river that they would have to cross, which divided further out into small channels, more easily forded. They thus went along the chord of the arc formed by the shore, and Aimé was somewhat reassured, as the sea was at first farther off; but before long they reached the stream, which lost itself in many little channels in the sands, so that when the tide was out there was a perfect network of little streams dividing low shingly or grassy isles, but at nearly high tide, as at present, many of these islets were submerged, and the strife between river and sea caused sudden deepenings of the water in the numerous channels.

The guide eagerly explained that the safest place for crossing was not by the large sandbank furthest inland and looking firm and promising—it was a recent shifting performance of the water's heaping up, and would certainly sink away and bury horse and man. They must ride further out, to the shingly isle; it and the

channels on either side had shingly bottoms, and were safe.

"This way," called Berenger, himself setting the example, and finding no difficulty; the water did not rise above his boots, and the current was not strong. He had reached the shingly isle when he looked round for his companions; Humfrey and Philip were close behind him; but, in spite of the loud "*gare!*" of the guide, Aimé, or his horse—for each was equally senseless with alarm—were making inwards; the horse was trying to tread on the sandbank, which gave way like the water itself, under its frantic struggles—there was a loud cry—a shrill, unmistakable woman's shriek—the horse was sinking—a white face and helpless form were being carried out on the waves, but not before Berenger had flung himself from his horse, thrown off his cloak and sword, and dashed into the water; and in the lapse of a few moments he struggled back to the island, where were Philip and Humfrey, leg-deep in water: the one received his burthen, the other helped him to land.

"On, gentlemen, not a moment to lose," cried the guide; and Berenger, still panting, flung himself on his horse, held out his arms, gathered the small, almost inanimate figure upon the horse's neck before him, and in a few minutes more they had crossed the perilous passage, and were on a higher bank where they could safely halt; and Philip, as he came to help his brother, exclaimed, "What a fool the boy is!"

"Hush!" said Berenger, gravely, as they laid the figure on the ground.

"What! He can't have been drowned in that moment. We'll bring him to."

"Hands off!" said Berenger, kneeling over the gasping form, and adding in a lower voice, "Don't you see?" He wound his hand in the long drenched hair,

and held it up, with cheeks burning like fire, and his scar purple.

"A woman!—what?—who?" Then suddenly divining, he exclaimed, "The jade!" and stared with wide eyes.

"Stand back," said Berenger; "she is coming to herself."

Perhaps she had been more herself than he knew, for, as he supported her head, her hand stole over his and held it fast. Full of consternation, perplexity, and anger as he was, he could not but feel a softening pity towards a creature so devoted, so entirely at his mercy. At the moment when she lay helpless against him, gasps heaving her breast under her manly doublet, her damp hair spread on his knees, her dark eyes in their languor raised imploringly to his face, her cold hand grasping his, he felt as if this great love were a reality, and as if he were hunting a shadow; and, as if fate would have it so, he must save and gratify one whose affection must conquer his, who was so tender, so beautiful—even native generosity seemed on her side. But in the midst, as in his perplexity, he looked up over the grey sea; he seemed to see the picture so often present to his mind of the pale, resolute girl, clasping her babe to her breast, fearless of the advancing sea, because true and faithful. And at that thought faith and prayer rallied once again round his heart, shame at the instant's wavering again dyed his cheek; he recalled himself, and speaking the more coldly and gravely because his heart was beating over hotly, he said, "Cousin, you are better. It is but a little way to Nissard."

"Why have you saved me, if you will not pity me?" she murmured.

"I will not pity, because I respect my kinswoman who has saved our lives," he said, steadying his voice

with difficulty. "The priest of Nissard will aid me in sparing your name and fame."

"Ah!" she cried, sitting up with a start of joy, "but he would make too many inquiries! Take me to England first."

Berenger started as he saw how he had been misunderstood.

"Neither here nor in England could my marriage be set aside, cousin. No; the priest shall take charge of you, and place you in safety and honour."

"He shall not!" she cried hotly. "Why—why will you drive me from you—me who ask only to follow you as a menial servant?"

"That has become impossible," he answered, "to say nothing of my brother, my servant, and the guide have seen;" and, as she remembered her streaming hair, and tried, in dawning confusion, to gather it together, he continued: "You shrank from the eye of the King of Navarre. You cannot continue as you have done; you have not even strength."

"Ah! had you sailed for England," she murmured.

"It had only been greater shame," he said. "Cousin, I am head of your family, husband of your kinswoman, and bound to respect the reputation you have risked for me. I shall, therefore, place you in charge of the priest till you can either return to your aunt or to some other convent. You can ride now. We will not wait longer in these wet garments."

He raised her from the ground, threw his own dry cloak round her shoulders and unmanageable hair, and lifted her on his horse; but, as she would have leant against him, he drew himself away, beckoned to Philip, and put the bridle into his hands, saying, "Take care of her. I shall ride on and warn the priest."

"The rock of diamond," she murmured, not aware that the diamond had been almost melting. That

youthful gravity and resolution, with a mixture of respect and protection, imposed as usual upon her passionate nature, and daunted her into meekly riding beside Philip without a word—only now and then he heard a low moan, and knew that she was weeping bitterly.

At first the lad had been shocked beyond measure, and would have held aloof as from a kind of monster, but Madame de Selinville had been the first woman to touch his fancy, and when he heard how piteously she was weeping, and recollecting where he should have been but for her, as well as all his own harshness to her as a cowardly boy, he felt himself brutally ungrateful, and spoke: "Don't weep so, Madame; I am sorry I was rude to you, but you see, how should I take you for a woman?"

Perhaps she heard, but she heeded not.

"My brother will take good care to shield you," Philip added. "He will take care you are safe in one of your nunneries;" and as she only wept the more, he added, with a sudden thought, "You would not go there; you would embrace the Protestant faith?"

"I would embrace whatever was his."

Philip muttered something about seeing what could be done. They were already at the entrance of the village, and Berenger had come out to meet them, and, springing towards him, Philip exclaimed, in a low voice, "Berry, she would abjure her Popish errors! You can't give her up to a priest."

"Foolery, Philip," answered Berenger, sternly.

"If she would be a convert!"

"Let her be a modest woman first;" and Berenger, taking her bridle, led her to the priest's house.

He found that Père Colombeau was preaching a Lent sermon, and that nobody was at home but the housekeeper, to whom he had explained briefly that

the lady with him had been forced to escape in disguise, had been nearly drowned, and was in need of refreshment and female clothing. Jacinthe did not like the sound, but drenched clothes were such a passport to her master's house, that she durst not refuse. Berenger carried off his other companions to the cabaret, and when he had dried himself, went to wait for the priest at the church-door, sitting in the porch, where more than one echo of the exhortation to repentance and purity rang in his ears, and enforced his conviction that here he must be cruel if he would be merciful.

It was long before Père Colombeau came out and then, if the scar had not blushed for all the rest of his face, the sickly, lanky lad of three years since would hardly have been recognised in the noble, powerful-looking young man who unbonneted to the good curé. But the priest's aspect was less benignant when Berenger tried to set before him his predicament; he coldly asked where the unhappy lady was; and when Berenger expressed his intention of coming the next morning to ask his counsel, he only bowed. He did not ask the brothers to supper, nor show any civility; and Berenger, as he walked back to the cabaret, perceived that his story was but half-believed, and that, if Diane's passion were still stronger than her truth or generosity, she would be able to make out a terrible case against him, and to willing ears, naturally disposed against a young cavalier and a heretic.

He sat much dispirited by the fire of the little wine shop, thinking that his forbearance had been well-nigh thrown away, and that his character would never be cleared in Eustacie's eyes, attaching, indeed, more importance to the blot than would have been done by a youth less carefully reared.

It was quite dark when a knock came to the door: the curé's white head appeared in the lamplight; he

nodded kindly to all the guests, and entreated that M. de Ribaumont would do him the favour to come and speak with him.

No sooner were they outside the house, than the curé held out his hand, saying, "Sir, forgive me for a grievous injustice towards you;" then pressing his hand, he added with a voice tremulous with emotion, "Sir, it is no slight thing to have saved a wandering sheep by your uprightness and loyalty."

"Have you then opened her eyes, father?" said Berenger, relieved from a heavy load.

"You have, my son," said the old man. "You have taught her what truth and virtue are. For the rest, you shall hear for yourself."

Before Berenger knew where he was, a door was opened, and he found himself in the church. The building was almost entirely dark; there were two tall lights at the altar in the distance, and a few little slender tapers burning before certain niches and shrines, but without power to conquer with the gloom more than enough to spread a pale circle of yellow light beneath them, and to show mysteriously a bit of vaulting above. A single lamp hung from an arch near the door, and beneath it, near a pillar, knelt, or rather crouched, on the floor, a female figure with a dark peasant cloak drawn over her head.

"The first token of penitence is reparation to the injured," said the priest.

Berenger looked at him anxiously.

"I will not leave you," he added. "See, I shall pray for you yonder, by the altar," and he slowly moved up the aisle.

"Rise, cousin, I entreat you," said Berenger, much embarrassed, as he disappeared in the darkness.

"I must speak thus," she answered, in a hoarse, exhausted voice. "Ah! pardon, pardon!" she added,

rising, however, so far as to raise clasped hands and an imploring face. "Ah! can you pardon? It was through me that you bear those wounds; that she—Eustacie—was forced into the masque, to detain you for *that* night. Ah! pardon."

"That is long past," said Berenger. "I have been too near death not to have pardoned that long ago. Rise, cousin, I cannot see you thus."

"That is not all," continued Diane. "It was I—I who moved my father to imprison you." Then, as he bent his head, and would have again entreated her to rise, she held out her hand as if to silence him, and spoke faster, more wildly. "Then—then I thought it would save your life. I thought——" she looked at him strangely with her great dark eyes, all hollow and cavernous in her white face.

"I know," said Berenger, kindly, "you often urged it on me."

There was a sort of movement on the part of the kneeling figure of the priest at the altar, and she interrupted, saying precipitately, "Then—then, I did think you free."

"Ah!" he gasped. "Now——!"

"Now I know that she lives!" and Diane once more sank at his feet a trembling, shrinking, annihilated heap of shame and misery.

Berenger absolutely gave a cry that, though instantly repressed, had the ring of ecstasy in it. "Cousin—cousin!" he cried, "all is forgiven—all forgotten, if you will only tell me where!"

"That I cannot," said Diane, rousing herself again, but speaking in a dull, indifferent tone, as of one to whom the prime bitterness was past, "save that she is under the care of the Duchess de Quinet;" and she then proceeded, as though repeating a lesson: "You remember the Italian conjurer whom you would not

consult? Would that I had not!" she added, clasping her hand. "His prediction lured me! Well, he saw my father privately, told him he had seen her, and had bought her jewels, even her hair. My father sent him in quest of her again, but told not me till the man returned with tidings that she was at Quinet, in favour with the Duchess. You remember that he went from home. It was to demand her; and, ah! you know how long I had loved you, and they told me that your marriage was void, and that all would be well upon the dispensation coming. And now the good father there tells me that I was deceived—cruelly deceived—that such a dispensation would not be granted save through gross misrepresentation." Then, as Berenger began to show tokens of eagerness to come at tidings of Eustacie, she continued, "Ah! it is vain to seek to excuse one you care not for. My father could learn nothing from the Duchess; she avowed that she had been there, but would say no more. However, he and my brother were sure she was under their protection; they took measures, and—and the morning my poor father was stricken, there had been a letter from my brother to say he was on her track, and matters must be ended with you, for he should have her in a week;" and then, as Berenger started forward with an inarticulate outburst, half of horror, half of interrogation, she added, "Where, he said not, nor did I learn from him. All our one interview was spent in sneers that answered to my wild entreaties; but this I know—that you would never have reached Tours a living man."

"And now, now he is on the way to her!" cried Berenger, "and you kept it from me!"

"There lay my hope," said Diane, raising her head; and now, with glittering eyes and altered voice, "How could I not but hate her who had bereaved me of you; her for whose sake I could not earn your love?"

The change of her tone had, perhaps, warned the priest to draw nearer, and as she perceived him, she said, "Yes, father, this is not the way to absolution, but my heart will burst if I say not all."

"Thou shalt not prevail, foul spirit," said the priest, looking earnestly into the darkness, as though he beheld the fiend hovering over her, "neither shall these holy walls be defiled with accents of unhallowed love. You have made your reparation, daughter; it is enough."

"And can you tell me no more?" said Berenger, sadly. "Can you give me no clue that I may save her from the wolf that may be already on her track? Cousin, if you would do this, I would bless you for ever."

"Alas! I would if I could! It is true, cousin, I have no heart to deceive you any longer. But it is to Madame de Quinet that you must apply, and if my brother has thought me worth pursuit, you may be in time! One moment—" as he would have sprung away as if in the impulse to fly to the rescue—"cousin; had you gone to England as I hoped, I would have striven to deserve to win that love of yours, but you have conquered by your constancy. Now, father, I have spoken my last save as penitent."

She covered her head and sank down again.

Berenger, bewildered and impelled to be doing something, let the priest lead him out before he exclaimed, "I said nothing to her of pardon!"

"You do pardon?" said the priest.

He paused a moment. "Freely, if I find my wife. I can only remember now that she set me on the way. I would ease her soul, poor thing, and thinking would make me hard again."

"Do the English bring up their sons with such feelings?" asked the curé, pausing for a moment.

"Of course," said Berenger. "May I say that one word, sir?"

"Not now," said the priest; "she had better be left to think of her sin towards Heaven, rather than towards man."

"But do you leave her there, sir?"

"I shall return. I shall pray for her true penitence," said the priest, and Berenger perceived from his tone that one without the pale might inquire no further. He only asked how safe and honourable shelter could be found for her; and the curé replied that he had already spoken to her of the convent of Luçon, and should take her there so soon as it could safely be done, and that Abbess Monique, he trusted, would assist her crushed spirit in finding the path of penitence. He thought her cousin had better not endeavour to see her again; and Berenger himself was ready to forget her very existence in his burning anxiety to outstrip Narcisse in the quest of Eustacie.

CHAPTER XXV

OUR LADY OF HOPE

"Welcome to danger's hour,
Brief greeting serves the time of strife."

SCOTT

AS SOON as it was possible to leave Nissard, Berenger was on his way back to head-quarters, where he hoped to meet the Duke de Quinet among the many Huguenot gentlemen who were flocking to the Bourbon standard; nor was he disappointed in the hope, for he was presented to a handsome middle-aged gentleman, who told him, with much politeness, that he was aware that his mother had had the honour to receive and entertain Mme. de Ribaumont, and that some months ago he had himself arranged for the conveyance of her letters to England, but, he said, with a smile, he made a point of knowing nothing of his mother's guests, lest his duties as a governor might clash with those of hospitality. He offered to expedite M. de Ribaumont's journey to Quinet, observing that, if Nid-de-Merle were, indeed, on the point of seizing the lady, it must be by treachery; indeed he had, not ten days back, had the satisfaction of hanging an Italian mountebank who had last year stolen a whole packet of despatches, among them letters from Mme. de Ribaumont, and the fellow was probably acting as a spy upon her, so that no time was to be lost in learning from his mother where she was. On the next morning he was about to send forward twenty men to

reinforce a little frontier garrison on the river Dronne, and as M. le Baron must pass through the place, it would be conferring a favour on him to take the command. The men were all well mounted, and would not delay; and when once across the frontier of Guyenne, no escort would be needed.

Berenger gladly accepted the proposal. It did not occur to him that he was thus involved in the civil war, and bearing arms against the sovereign. In spite of Queen Elizabeth's alliance with the French court, she connived at her youthful subjects seeking the bubble reputation in the mouths of Valois cannon; and so little did Henry III. seem to Berenger to be his king, that he never thought of the question of allegiance—nay, if the royal officers were truly concerned in his arrest, he was already an outlaw. This was no moment for decision between Catholic and Calvinist; all he wanted was to recover his wife and forestall her enemies.

Henry of Navarre gave his full consent to the detachment being placed under charge of M. de Ribau-mont. He asked somewhat significantly what had become of the young gentleman who had attended M. de Ribau-mont, and Philip blushed crimson to the ears, while Berenger replied, with greater coolness than he had given himself credit for, that the youth had been nearly drowned on the Sables d'Olonne, and had been left at Dom Colombeau's to recover. The sharp-witted King looked for a moment rather as Sir Hugh the Heron did when Marmion accounted for his page's absence, but was far too courteous and too *insouciant* to press the matter further, though Berenger saw quite enough of his expression to feel that he had been delivered from his companion only just in time.

Berenger set forth as soon as his impatience could prevail to get the men into their saddles. He would fain have ridden day and night, and grudged every

halt for refreshment, so as almost to run the risk of making the men mutinous. Evening was coming on, and his troop had dismounted at a cabaret, in front of which he paced up and down with Philip, trying to devise some pretext for hastening them on another stage before night, when a weary, travel-stained trooper rode up to the door and was at once hailed as a comrade by the other men, and asked, "What cheer at Pont de Dronne?"

"Bad enough," he answered, "unless you can make the more speed there!" Then making obeisance to Berenger he continued his report, saying that Captain Falconnet was sending him to M. le Duc with information that the Guisards were astir, and that five hundred *gens d'armes* under the black Nid-de-Merle, as it was said, were on their way intending to surprise Pont de Dronne, and thus cut the King of Navarre off from Guyenne and his kingdom beyond it. After this Berenger had no more difficulty with his men, who were most of them Quinet vassals, with homes south of the Dronne, and the messenger only halted for a hasty meal, hastening on to the Duke, that a more considerable succour might at once be despatched.

"Is she there whom they call the Lady of Hope?" asked one of the soldiers, a mercenary, less interested than most of his comrades, as he had only a fortnight since transferred his services from Guise to Quinet.

"Our Lady of Sadness just now," replied the messenger; "her old father is at the point of death. However, she is there, and at our last siege twenty wine-skins would not so well have kept up men's hearts."

"And the little one, the white fairy, is she there too? They say 'tis a spirit, a changeling that could not brook the inside of a church, but flew out of the Moustier at Montauban like a white swan, in the middle of a sermon."

"I only know I've seen her sleep like a dormouse through prayers, sermons, and all at Pont de Dronne. *Follette* if she be, she belongs to the white elves of the moonlight."

"Well, they say bullets won't touch her, and no place can be taken where she is," replied the trooper. "Nay, that Italian pedlar rogue, the same that the Duke has since hung, has sold to long Gilles and snub-nosed Pierre silver bullets, wherewith they have sworn to shoot the one or the other next time they had a chance."

These words were spoken at no great distance from Berenger, but passed by him as mere men-at-arms' gossip, in his eagerness to expedite the start of his party; and in less than an hour they were *en route* for Pont de Dronne: but hasten as he would, it was not till near noon the next day that he came in sight of a valley, through which wound a river, crossed by a high backed bridge, with a tall pointed arch in the middle, and a very small one on either side. An old building of red stone, looking like what it was—a monastery converted into a fortress—stood on the nearer or northern bank, and on the belfry tower waved a flag with the arms of Quinet. Higher up the valley, there was an ominous hum, and clouds of smoke and dust; and the *gens d'armes* who knew the country, rejoiced that they were come just in time, and exchanged anxious questions whether the enemy were not fording the river above them, so as to attack not only the fortress on this northern side, but the bridge tower on the southern bank of the river.

Spurring down the hill, the party were admitted, at the well-guarded gateway, into a large thickly-walled yard, where the soldiers and horses remained, and Berenger and Philip, passing through a small arched doorway into the body of the old monastery, were conducted to a great wainscoted hall, where a pulpit pro-

jecting from the wall, and some defaced emblematic ornaments, showed that this had once been the refectory, though guard-room appliances now occupied it. The man who had shown them in left them, saying he would acquaint Captain Falconnet with their arrival, and just then a sound of singing drew both brothers to the window. It looked out on what had once been the quadrangle, bounded on three sides by the church, the refectory, and the monks' lodgings, the cloistered arcade running round all these. The fourth side was skirted by the river, which was, however, concealed by an embankment, raised, no doubt, to supply the place of the wall, which had been unnecessary to the peaceful original inhabitants. What attracted Berenger's eyes was, however, a group in the cloister, consisting of a few drooping figures, some of men in steel caps, others of veiled, shrouded women, and strange, mingled feelings swept over him as he caught the notes of the psalm sung over the open grave—

“Si qu'en paix et seurté bonne
Coucheraï et reposeraï—
Car, Seigneur, ta bonté tout ordonne
Et elle seule espoir donne
Que seur et sain régnant serai.”

“Listen, Philip,” he said, with moistening eyes; then as they ended, “It is the 4th Psalm: ‘I lay me down in peace and take my rest.’ Eustacie and I used to sing it to my father. It was well done in these mourners to sing it over him whom they are laying down to take his rest while the enemy are at the gates. See, the poor wife still kneels while the rest disperse; how dejected and utterly desolate she looks.”

He was so intently watching her as not to perceive the entrance of a tall, grizzled old man in a steel cap, evidently the commander of the garrison. There was

the brief welcome of danger's hour—the briefer, because Captain Falconnet was extremely deaf, and, taking it for granted that the new comers were gentlemen of the Duke's proceeded to appoint them their posts without further question. Berenger had intended to pursue his journey to Quinet without delay, but the intelligence that the enemy were on the southern as well as the northern side of the river rendered this impossible; and besides, in defending this key of Guyenne against Narcisse, he was also defending Eustacie.

The state of affairs was soon made known to him. The old monastery, covering with its walls an extensive space, formed a fortress quite strong enough to resist desultory attacks, and protect the long bridge, which was itself strongly walled on either side, and with a barbican at the further end. In former assaults the attacks had always been on the north, the Catholic side, as it might be called; but now the enemy had crossed the river above the fort, and were investing the place on both sides. Long foreseeing this, the old commandant had guarded the bank of the river with an earthwork, a long mound sloped irregularly on either hand, over which numerous little paths had since been worn by the women within, when on their way to the river with their washing; but he had been setting every one to work to destroy and fill up these, so that the rampart was smooth and sloping, perfectly easy indeed to cross, but high and broad enough to serve as an effectual protection against such artillery as the detached troops of the Guise party were likely to possess; and the river was far too wide, deep, and strong in its main current to be forded in the face of a hostile garrison. The captain had about fifty *gens d'armes* in his garrison, besides the twenty new-comers whom he persisted in regarding as Berenger's charge; and there were, besides, some seventy peasants and silk-spinners,

who had come into the place as a refuge from the enemy—and with these he hoped to hold out till succour should come from the Duke. He himself took the command of the north gate, where the former assaults had been made, and he entrusted to his new ally the tower protecting the bridge, advising him to put on armour; but Berenger, trying on a steel cap, found that his head could not bear the weight and heat, and was forced to return to his broad-brimmed Spanish hat, while Philip in high glee armed himself as best he could with what Captain Falconnet could lend him. He was too much excited to eat of the scanty meal that was set before them: a real fight seemed like a fair-day to him, and he was greatly exalted by his brother's post of command—a post that Berenger felt a heavy responsibility only thrust upon him by the commandant's incapacity of hearing how utterly inexperienced he was.

The formal summons to surrender to the King, and the refusal, had duly passed, and it became evident that the first attack was to be on the bridge-gate. Captain Falconnet hurried to the place, and the fighting was hot and desperate. Every assailant who tried to throw his fagot into the moat became a mark for arquebus or pistol, and the weapons that had so lately hung over the hearth at Nid-de-Merle were now aimed again and again at the heads and corslets of Guisards, with something of the same exulting excitement as, only higher, more engrossing, and fiercer than, that with which the lads had taken aim at a wolf, or ridden after a fox. Scaling-ladders were planted and hurled down again; stones were cast from the battlements, crushing the enemy; and throughout Berenger's quick eye, alert movements, and great height and strength, made him a most valuable champion, often applauded by a low murmur of commendation from old Falconnet, or a



“THE FIGHTING WAS HOT AND DESPERATE”

loud shout of "Ha, well done, the Duke's Englishman," from the *gens d'armes*—for English they would have him to be—on the presumptions afforded by his companions, his complexion, and his slow speech. Nor did Philip and Humfrey fail to render good service. But just as the enemy had been foiled in a sharp assault and were dragging away their wounded, Philip touched his brother, and saying, "I can hold out no longer," showed blood trickling down his right side.

Berenger threw an arm round him, and Captain Falconnet seeing his case, said, "You are hit, *petit Anglaise*; you have done gallantly. There will be time for you to take him to his quarters, sir; these fellows have had enough for the present, and you can tarry with him till you hear the bugle. Whither, did you ask? Let me see. You, Renaud, take him to the chapel: the old chancel behind the boarding will be more private; and desire Madame to look to him. Farewell! I hope it may prove slight; you are a brave youth." And he shook hands with Philip, whose intense gratification sustained him for many steps afterwards.

He hardly remembered receiving the hurt, and was at first too busy to heed it, or to call off any one's attention, until a dread of falling, and being trodden on, had seized him and made him speak; and indeed he was so dizzy that Berenger with difficulty kept him on his feet over the bridge, and in the court lifted him in his arms and carried him almost fainting into the cloister, where by the new-made grave still knelt the black-veiled mourner. She started to her feet as the soldier spoke to her, and seemed at first not to gather the sense of his words; but then, as if with an effort, took them in, made one slight sound like a moan of remonstrance at the mention of the place, but again recollecting herself, led the way along a stone passage, into which a

flight of stairs descended into the apsidal chancel, roughly boarded off from the rest of the church. It was a ruinous, desolate place, and Berenger looked round in dismay for some place on which to lay down his almost unconscious burthen. The lady bent her head and signed towards the stone sedilia in the wall; then, after two ineffectual essays to make her voice audible, choked as it was with long weeping, she said, low and huskily, "We will make him more comfortable soon;" and added some orders to the soldier, who disappeared up the stairway, and Berenger understood that he was gone to fetch bedding. Then taking from under her heavy mourning cloak a large pair of scissors, she signed to Berenger how to support his brother, while they relieved him of his corslet, sword-belt, and doublet. The soldier had meantime returned with an old woman, both loaded with bedding, which she signed to them to arrange in one of the little bays or niches that served to form a crown of lesser chapels around the chancel. She flung aside her muffling cloak, but her black hood still hung over her face, and every now and then hand or handkerchief was lifted as if to clear her eyes from the tears that would not cease to gather and blind her; and she merely spoke when some direction to an assistant, some sympathetic word to the patient, was needed. Even Philip in his dizzy trance guessed that he was succeeding to the bed whence one much dearer had gone to his quieter rest in the cloister. Before he was laid there, however, the bugle sounded; there was a loud shout, and Philip exclaimed, "Go, brother!"

"Trust him to me, sir," said the sunken, extinguished voice; "we will do our best for him."

He was forced merely to lift Philip to the bed, and to hurry away, while the soldier followed him saying, consolingly, "Fear not, sir, now our Lady of Hope

has him. Nothing goes ill to which she sets her hand."

Another growl of artillery was now heard, and it was time for the warriors to forget the wounded in the exigencies of the present. An attack was made on both gates at once, and the commandant being engaged at his own post, Berenger had to make the utmost of his brief experience, backed by the counsel of a tough old sergeant: and great was his sense of exhilaration, and absolute enjoyment in this full and worthy taxing of every power of mind or body. The cry among the enemy, "Aim at the black plume," attested his prominence; but the black plume was still unscathed when spring twilight fell. The din began to subside; recalls were sounded by the besiegers; and Berenger heard his own exploit bawled in the ear of the deaf commandant, who was advancing over the bridge. The old captain complimented him, told him that he should be well reported of to M. le Duc and Sieur la Noue, and invited him to supper and bed in his own quarters. The supper Berenger accepted, so soon as he should know how it was with his brother; but as to bed, he intended to watch his brother, and visit his post from time to time.

The captain entered by the main door of the chapel, where ten or twelve wounded were now lying, tended by peasant women. Berenger merely passed through, seeing as he went the black hood busy over a freshly-brought-in patient. He found a door which admitted him through the rough screen of boards to the choir where he had been in the earlier part of the day. The moonlight came through the shivered eastern windows, but a canvas curtain had been hung so as to shelter Philip's vaulted recess from the cold draught, and the bed itself, with a chair beside it, looked neat, clean, and comfortable. Philip himself was cheery; he said the

bullet had made a mere flesh-wound, and had passed out on the other side, and the Lady of Hope, as they called her, was just such another as Aunt Cecily, and had made him very comfortable, with clean linen, good cool drinks, and the tenderest hand. But he was very sleepy, so sleepy that he hardly cared to hear of the combat, only he roused himself for a moment to say, "Brother, I have seen Dolly."

"Dolly!"

"Our sister Dolly."

"Ah, Phil! many a strange visitor has come to me in the Walnut Chamber at home."

"I tell you I was in my perfect senses," returned Philip; "there she was, just as when we left her. And, what was stranger still, she talked French."

"Sleep and see her again," laughed Berenger.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SILVER BULLET

"I am all wonder, O my son, my soul
Is stunned within me; powers to speak to him
Or to interrogate him have I none,
Or even to look on him."

COWPER'S *Odyssey*.

IN his waking senses Philip adhered to his story that his little sister Dolly had stood at the foot of his bed, calling him "*le pauvre*," and had afterwards disappeared, led away by the nursing lady. It seemed to Berenger a mere delusion of feverish weakness; for Philip had lost a great deal of blood, and the wound, though not dangerous permitted no attempt at moving, and gave much pain. Of the perfections of the lady as nurse and surgeon Philip could not say enough, and, pale and overwept as he allowed her to be, he declared that he was sure that her beauty must equal Mme. de Selinville's. Berenger laughed, and looking round this strange hospital, now lighted by the full rays of the morning sun, he was much struck by the scene.

It was the chancel of the old abbey church. The door by which they had entered was very small, and perhaps had led merely to the abbot's throne, as an irregularity for his own convenience, and only made manifest by the rendering away of the rich wooden stall work, some fragments of which still clung to the walls. The east end, like that of many French churches, formed a semicircle, the high altar having

been in the centre, and five tall deep bays forming lesser chapels embracing it, their vaults all gathered up into one lofty crown above, and a slender pillar separating between each chapel, each of which further contained a tall narrow window. Of course, all had been utterly desolated, and Philip was actually lying in one of these chapels, where the sculptured figure of St. John and his Eagle still remained on the wall; and a sufficient remnant of his glowing sanguine robe of love was still in the window to serve as a shield from the *bise*. The high altar of rich marbles was a mere heap of shattered rubbish; but what surprised Berenger more than all the ruined architectural beauty which his *cinque-cento* trained taste could not understand, was, that the tiles of the pavement were perfectly clean, and diligently swept, the rubbish piled up in corners; and here and there the relics of a cross or carved figure lay together, as by a tender, reverential hand. Even the morsels of painted glass had been placed side by side on the floor, so as to form a mosaic of dark red, blue, and green; and a child's toy lay beside this piece of patchwork. In the midst of his observations, however, Captain Falconnet's servant came to summon him to breakfast; and the old woman appearing at the same time, he could not help asking whether the Lady were coming.

"Oh yes, she will come to dress his wound in good time," answered the old woman.

"And when? I should like to hear what she thinks of it," said Berenger.

"How?" said the old woman, with a certain satisfaction in his disappointment; "is our Lady of Hope to be coming down among you gay gallants?"

"But who is this Lady of Hope?" demanded he.

"Who should she be but our good pastor's daughter? Ah! and a brave, good daughter she was too, abiding

the siege because his breath was so bad that he could not be moved."

"What was his name?" asked Berenger, attracted strangely by what he heard.

"Ribault, Monsieur—Pasteur Ribault. Ah! a good man, and sound preacher, when preach he could; but when he could not, his very presence kept the monks' *revenants* from vexing us—as a cat keeps mice away; and, ah the children have been changed creatures since Madame dealt with them. What! Monsieur would know why they call her our Lady of Hope? *Espérance* is her true name; and, moreover, in the former days this abbey had an image that they called Notre-Dame de l'Espérance, and the poor deceived folk thought it did great miracles. And so, when she came hither, and wrought such cures, and brought blessings wherever she went, it became a saying among us that at length we had our true Lady of Hope."

A more urgent summons here forced Berenger away, and his repetition of the same question received much the same answer from deaf old Captain Falconnet. He was obliged to repair to his post with merely a piece of bread in his hand; but, though vigilance was needful, the day bade fair to be far less actively occupied than its predecessor: the enemy were either disposed to turn the siege into a blockade, or were awaiting reinforcements and heavier artillery; and there were only a few desultory attacks in the early part of the morning. About an hour before noon, however, the besiegers seemed to be drawing out in arms, as if to receive some person of rank, and at the same time sounds were heard on the hills to the eastward, as if troops were on the march. Berenger having just been told by the old sergeant that probably all would be quiet for some time longer, and been almost laughed at by the veteran for consulting him whether

it would be permissible for him to be absent a few minutes to visit his brother, was setting out across the bridge for the purpose, his eyes in the direction of the rampart, which followed the curve of the river. The paths which—as has been said—the feet of the washer-women and drawers of water had worn away in quieter times, had been smoothed and scarped away on the outer side, so as to come to an abrupt termination some feet above the gay marigolds, coltsfoot, and other spring flowers that smiled by the water-side. Suddenly he beheld on the rampart a tiny grey and white figure, fearlessly trotting, or rather dancing, along the summit, and the men round him exclaimed, “The little moonbeam child!” “A fairy—a changeling!”—“They cannot shoot at such a babe!” “Nor could they harm her!” “*Hola! little one! Gare! go back to your mother!*” “Do not disturb yourself, sir; she is safer than you,” were the ejaculations almost at the same moment, while he sprang forward, horrified at the peril of such an infant. He had reached the angle between the bridge and rampart, when he perceived that neither humanity nor superstition were protecting the poor child; for, as she turned down the remnant of one of the treacherous little paths, a man in bright steel and deep black had spurred his horse to the river’s brink, and was deliberately taking aim at her. Furious at such brutality, Berenger fired the pistol he held in his hand, and the wretch dropped from his horse; but at the same moment his pistol exploded, and the child rolled down the bank, whence a piteous wail came up, impelling Berenger to leap down to her assistance, in the full face of the enemy. Perhaps he was protected for the moment by the confusion ensuing on the fall of the officer; and when he reached the bottom of the bank, he saw the little creature on her feet, her round cap and grey woollen dress stripped half off in the fall,

and her flaxen hair falling round her plump, white, exposed shoulder, but evidently unhurt, and gathering yellow marigolds as composedly as though she had been making May garlands. He snatched her up, and she said, with the same infantine dignity, "Yes, take me up; the naughty people spoilt the path. But I must take my beads first." And she tried to struggle out of his arms, pointing therewith to a broken string among the marshy herbage on which gleamed—the pearls of Ribaumont!

In the few seconds in which he grasped them, and then bore the child up the embankment in desperate bounds, a hail of bullets poured round him, ringing on his breastplate, shearing the plume from his hat, but scarcely even heard; and in another moment he had sprung down, on the inner side, grasping the child with all his might, but not daring even to look at her, in the wondrous flash of that first conviction. She spoke first. "Put me down, and let me have my beads," she said in a grave, clear tone; and then first he beheld a pair of dark blue eyes, a sweet wild-rose face—Dolly's all over. He pressed her so fast and so close, in so speechless and overpowering an ecstasy, that again she repeated, and in alarm, "Put me down, I want my mother!"

"Yes, yes! your mother! your mother! your mother!" he cried, unable to let her out of his embrace; and then restraining himself as he saw her frightened eyes, in absolute fear of her spurning him, or struggling from him, "My sweet! my child! Ah! do you not know me?" Then, remembering how wild this was, he struggled to speak calmly: "What are you called, my treasure?"

"I am *la petite Rayonette*," she said, with puzzled dignity and gravity; "and my mother says I have a beautiful long name of my own besides."

“Bérangère—my Bérangère——”

“That is what she says over me, as I go to sleep in her bosom at night,” said the child, in a wondering voice, soon exchanged for entreaty, “Oh, hug me not so hard! Oh, let me go—let me go to her! Mother! mother!”

“My child, mine own, I am taking thee!—Oh, do not struggle with me!” he cried, himself imploring now. “Child, one kiss for thy father;” and meantime, putting absolute force on his vehement affection, he was hurrying to the chancel.

There Philip hailed them with a shout as of desperate anxiety relieved; but before a word could be uttered, down the stairs flew the Lady of Hope, crying wildly, “Not there—she is not—” but perceiving the little one in the stranger’s arms, she held out her own, crying, “Ah! is she hurt, my angel?”

“Unhurt, Eustacie! Our child is unhurt!” Berenger said, with an agonized endeavour to be calm; but for the moment her instinct was so entirely absorbed in examining into the soundness of her child’s limbs, that she neither saw nor heard anything else.

“Eustacie,” he said, laying his hand on her arm. She started back, with bewildered eyes. “Eustacie—wife! do you not know me? Ah! I forgot that I am changed.”

“You—you—” she gasped, utterly confounded, and gazing as if turned to stone, and though at that moment the vibration of a mighty discharge of cannon rocked the walls, and strewed Philip’s bed with the crimson shivers of St. John’s robe, yet neither of them would have been sensible of it had not Humfrey rushed in at the same moment, crying, “They are coming on like fiends, sir!”

Berenger passed his hand over his face. “You will know me *when—if* I return, my dearest,” he said.

"It not, then still, thank God! Philip, to you I trust them!"

And with one kiss on that still, cold, almost petrified brow, he had dashed away. There was a space of absolutely motionless silence, save that Eustacie let herself drop on the chancel step, and the child, presently breaking the spell, pulled her to attract her notice to the flowers. "Mother, here are the *soucis* for the poor gentleman's broth. See, the naughty people had spoilt all the paths, and I rolled down and tore my frock, and down fell the beads, but be not angry, mother dear, for the good gentleman picked them up, and carried me up the bank."

"The bank!" cried Eustacie, with a scream, as the sense of the words reached her ears. "Ah! no wonder! Well might thy danger bring thy father's spirit;" and she grasped the little one fervently in her arms, murmuring, "Thank, thank God, indeed! Oh! my precious one; and did He send that blessed spirit to rescue thee?"

"And will you tie up my frock, and may I put the flowers into the broth?" chattered Rayonette. "And why did he kiss me and hug me so tight; and how did he know what you say over me as we fall asleep?"

Eustacie clasped her tighter, with a convulsive shudder of thankfulness; and Philip, but half hearing, and barely gathering the meaning of her mood, ventured to speak, "Madame——"

As if touched by an electric shock, Eustacie started up, as recalled to instant needs, and coming towards him said, "Do you want anything, sir? Pardon one who has but newly seen a spirit from the other world—brought by his child's danger." And the dazed, trance-like look was returning.

"Spirit!" cried Philip. "Nay, madame, it was himself. Ah! and you are she whom we have sought so

long; and this dear child—no wonder she has Dolly's face."

"Who—what?" said Eustacie, pressing her temples with her hands, as if to retain her senses. "Speak; was yonder a living or dead man—and who?"

"Living, thank God! and your own husband; that is, if you are really Eustacie. Are you indeed?" he added, becoming doubtful.

"Eustacie, that am I," she murmured. "But he is dead—they killed him; I saw the blood where he had waited for me. His child's danger brought him from the grave."

"No, no. Look at me, sister Eustacie. Listen to me. Osbert brought him home, more dead than alive—but alive still."

"No!" she cried, half passionately. "Never could he have lived and left me to mourn him so bitterly."

"If you knew—" cried Philip, growing indignant. "For weeks he lay in deadly lethargy, and when, with his left hand, he wrote and sent Osbert to you, your kinsfolk threw the poor fellow into a dungeon, and put us off with lies that you were married to your cousin. All believed, only he—sick, helpless, speechless, as he was—he trusted you still; and so soon as Méricour came, though he could scarcely brook the saddle, nothing would hold him from seeking you. We saw only ruin at La Sablerie, and well-nigh ever since we have been clapped up in prison by your uncle. We were on the way to Quinet to seek you. He has kept his faith whole through wounds and pain and prison and threats—ay, and sore temptation," cried Philip, waxing eloquent; "and, oh, it cannot be that you do not care for him!"

"Doubt not my faith, sir," said Eustacie, proudly; "I have been as true to him as if I had known he lived. Nor do I know who you are to question me."

At this moment the child pressed forward, holding between her two careful plump hands a red earthenware bowl, with the tisane steaming in it, and the yellow petals strewn over the surface. She and Philip had taken a great fancy to each other, and while her mother was busy with the other patients, she had been left to her quiet play with her fragments of glass, which she carried one by one to display, held up to the light, to her new friend; who, in his weak state, and after his long captivity, found her the more charming playmate because she so strangely reminded him of his own little sisters. She thought herself his little nurse, and missing from his broth the yellow petals that she had been wont to think the charm of tisane, the housewifely little being had trotted off, unseen and unmissed, across the quadrangle, over the embankment, where she had often gathered them, or attended on the "*lessive*" on the river's brink; and now she broke forth exultingly, "Here, here is the tisane with all the *soucis*. Let me feed you with them, sir."

"Ah! thou sweet one," gasped Philip, "I could as soon eat them as David could drink the water! For these—for these——!" and the tears rushed into his eyes. "Oh! let me but kiss her, madame; I loved her from the first moment. She has the very face of my little sister—my little sister and Berenger's. What, thou little sweeting, (what French word is good enough for her?) didst run into peril for me, not knowing how near I was to thee? What, must I eat it? Love me then."

But the boarded door was thrown back, and "Madame, more wounded," resounded. The thrill of terror, the elastic reaction, at the ensuing words, "from the north gate," was what made Eustacie in an instant know herself to be not widow but wife. She turned round at once, holding out her hand, and saying with

a shaken, agitated voice, "*Mon frère*, pardon me, I know not what I say; and, after all, he will find me *bien méchante* still." Then as Philip devoured her hand with kisses, and held it fast, "I must go; these poor men need me. When I can, I will return."

"Only let me have the little one," entreated Philip; "it is almost home already to look at her."

And when Eustacie next looked in on them, they were both fast asleep.

She, poor thing, the only woman with brains among the many scared females in the garrison, might not rest or look the wonder in the face. Fresh sufferers needed her care, and related gallant things of "the Duke's Englishman," things of desperate daring and prowess that sent the blood throbbing to her heart with exultation, but only to be followed by a pang of anguish at having let him go back to peril—nay, perhaps, to death—without a word of tenderness or even recognition.

She imaged him as the sunny-faced youth who had claimed her in the royal castle, and her longing to be at his side and cling to him as his own became every moment more fervent and irresistible, until she gladly recollected the necessity of carrying food to the defenders; and snatching an interval from her hospital cares, she sped to the old circular kitchen of the monastery, where she found the lame baker vainly trying to organize a party of frightened women to carry provisions to the garrison of the bridge-tower.

"Give some to me," she said. "My husband is there! I am come to fetch his dinner."

The peasant women looked and whispered as if they thought that, to add to their misfortunes, their Lady of Hope had become distracted by grief; and one or two, who held the old faith, and were like the crane among the sparrows, even observed that it was a judg-

ment for the profane name that had been given her, against which she had herself uniformly protested.

"My husband is come," said Eustacie, looking round with shining eyes. "Let us be brave wives, and not let our men famish."

She lifted up a loaf and a pitcher of broth, and with the latter poised on her erect and graceful head, and elastic though steady step, she led the way; the others following her with a sort of awe, as of one they fancied in a super-human state. In fact, there was no great danger in traversing the bridge with its lofty parapet on either side; and her mind was too much exalted and moved to be sensible of anything but a certain exulting awe of the battle sounds. There was, however, a kind of lull in the assault which had raged so fiercely ever since the fall of the officer, and the arrival of the reinforcements. Either the enemy had paused to take food, or were devising some fresh mode of attack; and as the line of women advanced, there started forth from under the arch a broad-shouldered, white-faced, golden-bearded personage, who cried joyously, "My dearest, my bravest! this for me!" and lifted the pitcher from her head as he grasped her hand with a flesh and blood clasp indeed, but the bright-cheeked, wavy-haired lad of her dream withered away with a shock of disappointment, and she only looked up with wistful puzzled earnestness instead of uttering the dear name that she had so long been whispering to herself.

"Dearest," he said, "this is precious indeed to me, that you should let me feast my eyes once more on you. But you may not tarry. The rogues may renew their attack at any moment."

She had thought of herself as insisting on standing beside him and sharing his peril. Had he been himself she must have done so, but this was a stranger, whose

claiming her made her shrink apart till she could feel the identity which, though she believed, she could not realize.

Her hand lay cold and tremulous within his warm pressure, but he was too much wrought up and too full of joy and haste to be sensible of anything but of the brave affection that had dared all to come to him; and he was perfectly happy, even as a trumpet-call among the foe warned him to press her fingers to his lips and say, as his bright blue eye kindled, "God grant that we may meet and thank Him to-night! Farewell, my lost and found! I fight as one who has something to fight for."

He might not leave his post, but he watched her with eyes that could not be satiated, as she recrossed the bridge; and, verily, his superabundant ecstasy, and the energy that was born of it, were all needed to sustain the spirits of his garrison through that terrible afternoon. The enemy seemed to be determined to carry the place before it could be relieved, and renewed the storm again and again with increasing violence; while the defenders, disheartened by their pertinacity, dismayed at the effects of the heavy artillery, now brought to bear on the tower, and direfully afraid of having the bridge destroyed, would have abandoned their barbican and shut themselves up within the body of the place had not Berenger been here, there, and everywhere, directing, commanding, exhorting, cheering, encouraging, exciting enthusiasm by word and example, winning proud admiration by feats of valour and dexterity sprung of the ecstatic inspiration of new-found bliss, and watching, as the conscious defender of his own most beloved, without a moment's respite, till twilight stillness sank on the enemy, and old Falconnet came to relieve him, thanking him for his gallant defence, and auguring that, by noonday to-mor-

row at latest, M. le Duc would succour them, unless he were hampered by any folly of this impetuous young Navarre.

Too blissful for the sense of fatigue, Berenger began to impart to the Commandant his delight, but the only answer he got was "Hope, yes, every hope;" and he again recognised what he had already perceived, that the indistinctness of his utterance made him entirely unintelligible to the deaf Commandant, and that shouting did but proclaim to the whole garrison, perhaps even to the enemy's camp, what was still too new a joy not to be a secret treasure of delight. So he only wrung the old Captain's hand, and strode away as soon as he was released.

It was nearly dark, in spite of a rising moon, but beneath the cloister arch was torch-light, glancing on a steel head-piece, and on a white cap, both bending down over a prostrate figure; and he heard the voice he loved so well say, "It is over! I can do no more. It were best to dig his grave at once here in silence—it will discourage the people less. Renaud and Armand, here!"

He paused for a few minutes unseen in the shadow while she closed the eyes and composed the limbs of the dead soldier; then, kneeling, said the Lord's Prayer in French over him. Was this the being he had left as the petted plaything of the palace? When she rose, she came to the arch and gazed wistfully across the moonlit quadrangle, beyond the dark shade cast by the buildings, saying to the soldier, "You are sure he was safe?"

"My Eustacie," said Berenger, coming forward, "we meet in grave times!"

The relief of knowing him safe after the sickening yearnings and suspense of the day, and moreover the old ring of tenderness in his tone, made her spring to

him with real warmth of gladness, and cry, "It is you! All is well."

"Blessedly well, *ma mie*, my sweetheart," he said, throwing his arms round her, and she rested against him murmuring, "Now I feel it! Thou art thyself!" They were in the dark cloister passage, and when he would have moved forward she clung closer to him and murmured, "Oh wait, wait, yet an instant—Thus I can feel that I have thee—the same—my own!"

"My poor darling," said Berenger, after a second, "you must learn to bear with both my looks and speech, though I be but a sorry shattered fellow for you."

"No, no," she cried, hanging on him with double fervour. "No, I am loving you the more already—doubly—trebly—a thousand times. Only those moments were so precious, they made all these long years as nothing. But come to the little one, and to your brother."

The little one had already heard them, and was starting forward to meet them, though daunted for a moment by the sight of the strange father: she stood on the pavement, in the full flood of the moonlight from the east window, which whitened her fair face, flaxen hair, and grey dress, so that she did truly look like some spirit woven of the moonbeams. Eustacie gave a cry of satisfaction: "Ah! good, good; it was by moonlight that I saw her first!"

Berenger took her in his arms, and held her to his breast with a sense of insatiable love, while Philip exclaimed, "Ay, well may you make much of her, brother. Well might you seek them far and wide. Such treasures are not to be found in the wide world."

Berenger, without answering, carried the little one to the step of the ruined high altar, and there knelt, holding Eustacie by the hand, the child in one arm, and, with the moon glancing on his high white brow and

earnest face, he spoke a few words of solemn thanks and prayer for a blessing on their reunion, and the babe so wonderfully preserved to them.

Not till then did he carry her into the lamplight by Philip's bed, and scan therein every feature, to satisfy his eyes with the fulfilled hope that had borne him through those darkest days, when, despairing of the mother, the thought of the child had still sustained him to throw his will into the balance of the scale between life and death. Little Bérangère gazed up into his face silently, with wondering, grave, and somewhat sleepy eyes, and then he saw them fix themselves on his powder-grimed and blood-stained hands. "Ah! little heart," he said, "I am truly in no state to handle so pure a piece of sugar as thou; I should have rid myself of the battle-stains ere touching thee, but how recollect anything at such a moment?"

Eustacie was glad he had broken the spell of silence; for having recovered her husband, her first instinct was to wait upon him. She took the child from him, explaining that she was going to put her to bed in her own rooms up the stone stair, which for the present were filled with the fugitive women and children who had come in from the country, so that the chancel must continue the lodging of Berenger and his brother; and for the time of her absence she brought him water to wash away the stains, and set before him the soup she had kept warm over her little charcoal brazier. It was only when thus left that he could own, in answer to Philip's inquiries, that he could feel either hunger or weariness; nay, he would only acknowledge enough of the latter to give a perfect charm to rest under such auspices. Eustacie had despatched her motherly cares promptly enough to be with him again just as in taking off his corslet he had found that it had been pierced by a bullet, and pursuing the trace, through

his doublet, he found it lodged in that purse which he had so long worn next his heart, where it had spent its force against the single pearl of Ribaumont. And holding it up to the light, he saw that it was of silver. Then there returned on him and Philip the words they had heard two days before, of silver bullets forged for the destruction of the white moonlight fairy, and he further remembered the moment's shock and blow that in the midst of his wild amaze on the river's bank had made him gather his breath and strength to bound desperately upwards, lest the next moment he should find himself wounded and powerless.

For the innocent, then, had the shot been intended; and she running into danger out of her sweet, tender instincts of helpfulness, had been barely saved at the extreme peril of her unconscious father's life. Philip, whose vehement affection for the little one had been growing all day, was in the act of telling Berenger to string the bullet in the place of the injured pearl, as the most precious heirloom of Ribaumont bravery, when Eustacie returned, and learning all, grew pale and shuddered as danger had never made her before: but this strange day had almost made a coward of her.

"And this it has spared," said Berenger, taking out the string of little yellow shells. "Dost know them, sweet heart? They have been my chaplet all this time."

"Ah!" cried Eustacie, "poor, good Mademoiselle Noémi! she threaded them for my child, when she was very little. Ah! could she have given them to you—could it then not have been true—that horror?"

"Alas! it was too true! I found these shells in the empty cradle, in the burnt house, and deemed them all I should ever have of my babe."

"Poor Noémi! poor Noémi! She always longed to be a martyr; but we fled from her, and the fate we

had brought on her. That was the thought that preyed on my dear father. He grieved so to have left his sheep—and it was only for my sake. Ah! I have brought evil on all who have been good to me, beginning with you. You had better cast me off, or I shall bring yet worse!”

“Let it be so, if we are only together.”

He drew her to him and she laid her head on his shoulder, murmuring, “Ah! father, father, were you but here to see it. So desolate yesterday, so ineffably blest to-day. Oh! I cannot even grieve for him now, save that he could not just have seen us; yet I think he knew it would be so.”

“Nay, it may be that he does see us,” said Berenger. “Would that I had known who it was whom you were laying down *‘en paix et seurté bonne!’* As it was, the psalm brought precious thoughts of Château Leurre, and the little wife who was wont to sing it with me.”

“Ah!” said Eustacie, “it was when he sang those words as he was about to sleep in the ruin of the Temple that first I—cowering there in terror—knew him for no Templar’s ghost, but for a friend. That story ended my worst desolation. That night he became my father; the next my child came to me!”

“My precious treasure! Ah! what you must have undergone, and I all unknowing, capable of nothing wiser than going out of my senses, and raging in a fever because I could convince no one that those were all lies about your being aught but my true and loving wife. But tell me, what brought thee hither to be the tutelary patron, where, but for the siege, I had overpassed thee on the way to Quinet?”

Then Eustacie told him how the Italian pedlar had stolen her letters, and attempted to poison her child—the pedlar whom he soon identified with that wizard who had talked to him of “Espérance,” until the cue

had evidently been given by the Chevalier. Soon after the Duke had despatched a messenger to say that the Chevalier de Ribbaumont was on the way to demand his niece; and as it was a period of peace, and the law was decidedly on his side, Madame de Quinet would be unable to offer any resistance. She therefore had resolved to send Eustacie away—not to any of the seaports whither the uncle would be likely to trace her, but absolutely to a place which he would have passed through on his journey into Guyenne. The monastery of Notre-Dame de l'Espérance at Pont de Dronne had been cruelly devastated by the Huguenots in order to form a fortress to command the passage of the river, and a garrison had been placed there, as well as a colony of silk-spinners, attracted by the mulberry-trees of the old abbey garden. These, however, having conceived some terror of the ghosts of the murdered monks, had entreated for a pastor to protect them; and Madame la Duchesse thought that in this capacity Isaac Gardon, known by one of the many aliases to which the Calvinist ministers constantly resorted, might avoid suspicion for the present. She took the persecuted fugitives for some stages in an opposite direction, in her own coach, then returned to face and baffle the Chevalier, while her trusty steward, by a long *détour*, conducted them to Pont de Dronne, which they reached the very night after the Chevalier had returned through it to Nid-de-Merle.

The pastor and his daughter were placed under the special protection of Captain Falconnet, and the steward had taken care that they should be well lodged in three rooms that had once been the abbot's apartments. Their stay had been at first intended to be short, but the long journey had been so full of suffering to Isaac, and left such serious effects, that Eustacie could not bear to undertake it again, and Madame de Quinet

soon perceived that she was safer there than at the chateau, since strangers were seldom admitted to the fortress, and her presence there attracted no attention. But for Isaac Gardon's declining health, Eustacie would have been much happier here than at the chateau; the homely housewifely life, where all depended on her, suited her; and, using her lessons in domestic arts of nursing and medicine for the benefit of her father's flock, she had found, to her dismay, that the simple people, in their veneration, had made her into a sort of successor to the patroness of the convent. Isaac had revived enough for a time to be able to conduct the worship in the church, and to instruct some of his flock; but the teaching of the young had been more and more transferred to her, and, as she ingenuously said, had taught her more than she ever knew before. He gradually became weaker through more suffering, and was absolutely incapable of removal, when an attack by the Guisards was threatened. Eustacie might have been sent back to Quinet; but she would not hear of leaving him; and this first had been a mere slight attack, as if a mere experiment on the strength of the place. She had, however, then had to take the lead in controlling the women, and teaching them to act as nurses, and to carry out provisions; and she must then have been seen by some one, who reported her presence there to Narcisse—perhaps by the Italian pedlar. Indeed Humfrey, who came in for a moment to receive his master's orders, report his watch, and greet his lady, narrated, on the authority of the lately enlisted men-at-arms, that M. de Nid-de-Merle had promised twenty crowns to any one who might shoot down the heretic's little white *diablesse*.

About six weeks had elapsed since the first attack on Pont de Dronne, and in that time Gardon had sunk rapidly. He died as he lived, a gentle, patient man,

not a characteristic Calvinist, though his lot had been thrown with that party in his perplexed life of truth-seeking and disappointment in the aspirations and hopes of early youth. He had been, however, full of peace and trust that he should open his eyes where the light was clear, and no cloud on either side would mar his perception; and his thankfulness had been great for the blessing that his almost heaven-sent daughter had been to him in his loneliness, bereavement, and decay. Much as he loved her, he did not show himself grieved or distressed on her account; but, as he told her, he took the summons to leave her as a sign that his task was done, and the term of her trials ended. "I trust as fully," he said, "that thou wilt soon be in safe and loving hands, as though I could commit thee to them."

And so he died in her arms, leaving her a far fuller measure of blessing and of love than ever she had derived from her own father; and as the enemy's trumpets were already sounding on the hills, she had feared insult to his remains, and had procured his almost immediate burial in the cloister, bidding the assistants sing, as his farewell, that evening psalm which had first brought soothing to her hunted spirit.

There, while unable, after hours of weeping, to tear herself from the grave of her father and protector, had she in her utter desolation been startled by the summons, not only to attend to the wounded stranger, but to lodge him in the chancel. "Only this was wanting," was the first thought in her desolation, for this had been her own most cherished resort. Either the *bise*, or fear of a haunted spot, or both, had led to the nailing up of boards over the dividing screen, so that the chancel was entirely concealed from the church; and no one ever thought of setting foot there till Eustacie, whose Catholic reverence was indestructible, even when she was only half sure that it was not

worse than a foible, had stolen down thither, grieved at its utter desolation, and with fond and careful hands had cleansed it, and amended the ruin so far as she might. She had no other place where she was sure of being uninterrupted; and here had been her oratory, where she daily prayed, and often came to hide her tears and rally her spirits through that long attendance on her fatherly friend. It had been a stolen pleasure. Her reverent work there, if once observed, would have been treated as rank idolatry; and it was with consternation as well as grief that she found, by the Captain's command, that this her sanctuary and refuge was to be invaded by strange soldiers! Little did she think——!

And thus they sat, telling each other all, on the step of the ruined chancel, among the lights and shadows of the apse. How unlike the stately Louvre's halls of statuary and cabinets of porcelain, or the Arcadian groves of Montpipeau! and yet how little they recked that they were in a beleaguered fortress, in the midst of ruins, wounded sufferers all around, themselves in hourly jeopardy. It was enough that they had one another. They were so supremely happy that their minds unconsciously gathered up those pale lights and dark fantastic shades as adjuncts of their bliss.

CHAPTER XXVII

LE BAISER D'EUSTACIE

"No pitying voice, no eye, affords
One tear to grace his obsequies."

GRAY.

GOLDEN sunshine made rubies and sapphires of the fragments of glass in the windows of Notre-Dame de l'Espérance, and lighted up the brown face and earnest eyes of the little dark figure, who, with hands clasped round her knees, sat gazing as if she could never gaze her full, upon the sleeping warrior beside whom she sat, his clear straight profile like a cameo, both in chiselling and in colour, as it lay on the brown cloak where he slept the profound sleep of content and of fatigue.

Neither she nor Philip would have spoken or stirred to break that well-earned rest; but sounds from without were not long in opening his eyes, and as they met her intent gaze, he smiled and said, "Good morrow, sweet heart! What, learning how ugly a fellow has come back to thee?"

"No, indeed! I was trying to trace thine old likeness, and then wondering how I ever liked thy boyish face better than the noble look thou bearest now!"

"Ah! when I set out to come to thee, I was a walking rainbow; yet I was coxcomb enough to think thou wouldst overlook it."

"Show me those cruel strokes," she said; "I see one"—and her finger traced the seam as poor King

Charles had done—"but where is the one my wicked cousin called by that frightful name?"

"Nay, verily, that sweet name spared my life! A little less spite at my peach cheek, and I had been sped, and had not lisped and stammered all my days in honour of *le baiser d'Eustacie!*" and as he pushed aside his long golden silk moustache to show the ineffaceable red and purple scar, he added, smiling, "It has waited long for its right remedy."

At that moment the door in the rood-screen opened. Captain Falconnet's one eye stared in amazement, and from beneath his grey moustache thundered forth the word "*comment!*" in accents fit to wake the dead.

Was this Espérance, the most irreproachable of pastor's daughters and widows? "What, Madame, so soon as your good father is under ground? At least I thought *one* woman could be trusted; but it seems we must see to the wounded ourselves."

She blushed, but stood her ground; and Berenger shouted, "She is my wife, sir!—my wife whom I have sought so long!"

"That must be as Madame la Duchesse chooses," said the Captain. "She is under her charge, and must be sent to her as soon as this *canaille* is cleared off. To your rooms, madame!"

"I am her husband!" again cried Berenger. "We have been married sixteen years."

"You need not talk to me of dowry; Madame la Duchesse will settle that, if you are fool enough to mean anything by it. No, no, mademoiselle, I've no time for folly. Come with me, sir, and see if that be true which they say of the rogues outside."

And putting his arm into Berenger's, he fairly carried him off, discoursing by the way on *feu* M. l'Amiral's saying that "over-strictness in camp was perilous, since a young saint, an old devil," but warn-

ing him that this was prohibited gear, as he was responsible for the young woman to Madame la Duchesse. Berenger, who had never made the Captain hear anything that he did not know before, looked about for some interpreter whose voice might be more effectual, but found himself being conducted to the spiral stair of the church steeple; and suddenly gathering that some new feature in the case had arisen, followed the old man eagerly up the winding steps to the little square of leaden roof where the Quinet banner was planted. It commanded a wide and splendid view, to the Bay of Biscay on the one hand, and the inland mountains on the other; but the warder who already stood there pointed silently to the north, where, on the road by which Berenger had come, was to be seen a cloud of dust, gilded by the rays of the rising sun.

Who raised it was a matter of no doubt; and Berenger's morning orisons were paid with folded hands, in silent thanksgiving, as he watched the sparkling of pikes and gleaming of helmets—and the white flag of Bourbon at length became visible.

Already the enemy below were sending out scouts—they rode to the top of the hill—then a messenger swam his horse across the river. In the camp before the bridge-tower men buzzed out of their tents, like ants whose hill is disturbed; horses were fastened to the cannon, tents were struck, and it was plain that the siege was to be raised.

Captain Falconnet did his ally the honour to consult him on the expedience of molesting the Guisards by a sally, and trying to take some of their guns; but Berenger merely bowed to whatever he said, while he debated aloud the *pros* and *cons*, and at last decided that the garrison had been too much reduced for this, and that M. le Duc would prefer finding them drawn up in good order to receive him, to their going chasing and

plundering disreputably among the enemy—the Duke being here evidently a much greater personage than the King of Navarre, hereditary Governor of Guyenne though he were. Indeed, nothing was wanting to the confusion of Berenger's late assailants. In the camp on the north side of the river, things were done with some order; but that on the other side was absolutely abandoned, and crowds were making in disorder for the ford, leaving everything behind them, that they might not have their retreat cut off. Would there be a battle? Falconnet, taking in with his eye the numbers of the succouring party, thought the Duke would allow the besiegers to depart unmolested, but remembered with a sigh that a young king had come to meddle in their affairs!

However, it was needful to go down and marshal the men for the reception of the new comers, or to join in the fight, as the case might be.

And it was a peaceful entrance that took place some hours later, and was watched from the windows of the prior's rooms by Eustacie, her child, and Philip, whom she had been able to install in her own apartments, which had been vacated by the refugee women in haste to return home, and where he now sat in Maître Gardon's great straw chair, wrapped in his loose gown, and looking out at the northern gates, thrown open to receive the King and Duke, old Falconnet presenting the keys to the Duke, the Duke bowing low as he offered them to the King, and the King waving them back to the Duke and the Captain. Then they saw Falconnet presenting the tall auxiliary who had been so valuable to him, the joyous greeting of an old friend bestowed on him, his gesture as he pointed up to the window, and the King's upward look, as he doffed his hat and bowed low, while Eustacie responded with the most graceful of reverences, such as reminded

Philip that his little sister-in-law and tender nurse was in truth a great court lady.

Presently Berenger came upstairs, bringing with him his faithful foster-brother Osbert, who, though looking gaunt and lean, had nearly recovered his strength, and had accompanied the army in hopes of finding his master. The good fellow was full of delight at the welcome of his lady, and at once bestirred himself in assisting her in rectifying the confusion in which her guests had left her apartment.

Matters had not long been set straight when steps were heard on the stone stair, and, the door opening wide, Captain Falconnet's gruff voice was heard, "This way, Monseigneur; this way, Sire."

This was Madame la Baronne de Ribaumont's first reception. She was standing at the dark walnut table, fresh starching and crimping Berenger's solitary ruff, while under her merry superintendence those constant playfellows, Philip and Rayonette, were washing, or pretending to wash, radishes in a large wooden bowl, and Berenger was endeavouring to write his letter of good tidings, to be sent by special messenger to his grandfather. Philip was in something very like a Geneva gown; Eustacie wore her prim white cap and frill, and coarse black serge kirtle; and there was but one chair besides that one which Philip was desired to retain, only two three-legged stools and a bench.

Nevertheless, Madame de Ribaumont was equal to the occasion; nothing could have been more courtly, graceful, or unembarrassed than her manner of receiving the King's gallant compliments, and of performing all the courtesies suited to the hostess and queen of the place: it was the air that would have befitted the stateliest castle hall, yet that in its simplicity and brightness still more embellished the old ruinous convent-cell. The King was delighted, he sat down upon one of the

three-legged stools, took Rayonette upon his knee, undertook to finish washing the radishes, but ate nearly all he washed, declaring that they put him in mind of his old hardy days on the mountains of Béarn. He insisted on hearing all Rayonette's adventure in detail; and on seeing the pearls and the silver bullet, "You could scarcely have needed the token, sir," said he with a smile to Berenger; "Mademoiselle had already shown herself of the true blood of the bravest of knights."

The tidings of the attack on Pont de Dronne had caused the Duke to make a forced march to its relief, in which the King had insisted on joining him; and they now intended to wait at Pont de Dronne till the rest of the troops came up, and to continue their march through Guyenne to Nérac, the capital of Henry's county of Foix. The Duke suggested that if Philip were well enough to move when the army proceeded, the family might then take him to Quinet, where the Duchess would be very desirous to see Madame; and therewith they took leave with some good-humoured mirth as to whether M. de Ribaumont would join them at supper, or remain in the bosom of his family, and whether he were to be regarded as a gay bridegroom or a husband of sixteen years' standing.

Presently Osbert knocked at the door, and entered with a bundle in his arms, and the air of having done the right thing.

"There, sir," he said with proud satisfaction, "I have been to the camp across the river. I heard there were good stuffs to be had there for nothing, and thought I would see if I could find a coat for Monsieur Philippe, for his own is a mere ruin."

This was true, for Eustacie had been deciding that between blood and rents it had become a hopeless case for renovation; and Osbert joyfully displayed a beautifully-embroidered coat of soft leather, which he had

purchased for a very small sum of a plunderer who had been there before him. The camp had been so hastily abandoned that all the luggage had been left, and, like a true valet, Osbert had not neglected the opportunity of replenishing his master's wardrobe. "And," said he, "I saw there one whom M. le Baron knows—M. de Nid-de-Merle."

"Here!" cried Eustacie, startled for a moment, but her eyes resting reassured on her husband.

"Madame need not be alarmed," said Osbert; "M. le Baron has well repaid him. Ah! ah! there he lies, a spectacle for all good Christians to delight in."

"It was then he, *le scélérat*?" exclaimed Berenger; "I had already thought it possible."

"And he fell by your hands!" cried Eustacie. "That is as it should be."

"Yes, Madame," said Osbert; "it did my very heart good to see him writhing there like a crushed viper. M. le Baron's bullet was mortal, and his own people thought him not worth the moving, so there he lies on the ground howling and cursing. I would have given him the *coup de grâce* myself, but that I thought M. le Baron might have some family matters to settle with him; so I only asked what he thought now of clapping guiltless folk into dungeons, and shooting innocent children like sparrows; but he grinned and cursed like a demon, and I left him."

Berenger was too supremely and triumphantly happy not to be full of mercy; and as Osbert guided him to the hut where the miserable man lay, he felt little but compassion. The scene was worse than he had expected; for not only had the attendants fled, but plunderers had come in their room, rent away the coverings from the bed, and torn the dying man from it. Livid, nearly naked, covered with blood, his fingers hacked, and ears torn for the sake of the jewels on them, lay

the dainty and effeminate tiger-fop of former days, moaning and scarcely sensible. But when the mattress had been replaced, and Berenger had lifted him back to it, laid a cloak over him, and moistened his lips, he opened his eyes, but only to exclaim, "You there! as if I had not enough to mock me! Away!" and closed them sullenly.

"I would try to relieve you, cousin," said Berenger.

The answer was a savage malediction on hypocrisy, and the words, "And my sister?"

"Your sister is in all honour and purity at the nunnery of Luçon."

He laughed a horrible, incredulous laugh. "Safely disposed of ere you cajoled *la petite* with the fable of your faithfulness! Nothing like a Huguenot for lying to both sides;" and then ensued another burst of imprecations on the delay that had prevented him from seizing the fugitives—till Berenger felt as if the breath of hell were upon him, and could not help vindicating himself, vain though he knew it to be: "Narcisse de Ribaumont," he said gravely "my word has never been broken, and you know the keeping of it has not been without cost. On that word believe that Madame de Selinville is as spotless a matron as when she perilled herself to save my life. I never even knew her sex till I had drawn her half drowned from the sea, and after that I only saw her in the presence of Dom Colombeau of Nissard, in whose care I left her."

Narcisse's features contorted themselves into a frightful sneer as he muttered, "The intolerable fool! and that he should have got the better of me, that is if it be true—and I believe not a word of it."

"At least," said Berenger, "waste not these last hours on hating and reviling me, but let this fellow of mine, who is a very fair surgeon, bind your wound again."

"Eh!" said Narcisse, spitefully, turning his head,

"your own rogue? Let me see what work he made of *le baiser d'Eustacie*. Pray, how does it please her?"

"She thanks Heaven that your chief care was to spoil my face."

"I hear she is a prime doctress; but of course you brought her not hither lest she should hear *how* you got out of our keeping."

"She knows it."

"Ah! she has been long enough at court to know one must overlook, that one's own little matters may be overlooked."

Berenger burst out at last, "Her I will not hear blasphemed: the next word against her I leave you to yourself."

"That is all I want," said Narcisse. "These cares of yours are only *douceurs* to your conceited heretical conscience, and a lengthening out of this miserable affair. You would scoff at the only real service you could render me."

"And that is——"

"To fetch a priest. Ha! ha! one of your sort would sooner hang me. You had rather see me perish body and soul in this Huguenot doghole! What! do you stammer? Bring a psalm-singing heretic here, and I'll teach him and you what you *may* call blasphemy."

"A priest you shall have, cousin," said Berenger gravely; "I will do my utmost to bring you one. Meanwhile, strive to bring yourself into a state in which he may benefit you."

Berenger was resolved that the promise should be kept. He saw that despair was hardening the wretched man's heart, and that the possibility of fulfilling his Church's rites might lead him to address himself to repentance; but the difficulties were great. Osbert, the only Catholic at hand, was disposed to continue his vengeance beyond the grave, and only at his

master's express command would even exercise his skill to endeavour to preserve life till the confessor could be brought. Ordinary Huguenots would regard the desire of Narcisse as a wicked superstition, and Berenger could only hurry back to consult some of the gentlemen who might be supposed more unprejudiced.

As he was crossing the quadrangle at full speed, he almost ran against the King of Navarre, who was pacing up and down reading letters, and who replied to his hasty apologies by saying he looked as if the fair Eurydice had slipped through his hands again into the Inferno.

"Not so, Sire, but there is one too near those gates. Nid-de-Merle is lying at the point of death, calling for a priest."

"*Ventre Saint-Gris!*" exclaimed the King, "he is the very demon of the piece, who carved your face, stole your wife, and had nearly shot your daughter."

"The more need of his repentance, Sire, and without a priest he will not try to repent. I have promised him one."

"A bold promise!" said Henry. "Have you thought how our good friends here are likely to receive a priest of Baal into the camp?"

"No, Sire, but my best must be done. I pray you counsel me."

Henry laughed at the simple confidence of the request, but replied, "The readiest way to obtain a priest will be to ride with a flag of truce to the enemy's camp—they are at St. Esmé—and say that M. de Nid-de-Merle is a prisoner and dying, and that I offer safe-conduct to any priest that will come to him—though whether a red-hot Calvinist will respect my safe-conduct or your escort is another matter."

"At least, Sire, you sanction my making this request?"

"Have you men enough to take with you to guard you from marauders?"

"I have but two servants, Sire, and I have left them with the wounded man."

"Then I will send with you half a dozen Gascons, who have been long enough at Paris with me to have no scruples."

By the time Berenger had explained matters to his wife and brother, and snatched a hasty meal, a party of gay, soldierly-looking fellows were in the saddle, commanded by a bronzed sergeant who was perfectly at home in conducting messages between contending parties. After a dark ride of about five miles, the camp at the village of St. Esmé was reached, and this person recommended that he himself should go forward with a trumpet, since M. de Ribaumont was liable to be claimed as an escaped prisoner. There was then a tedious delay, but at length the soldier returned, and another horseman with him. A priest who had come to the camp in search of M. de Nid-de-Merle was willing to trust himself to the King of Navarre's safe-conduct.

"Thanks, sir," cried Berenger; "this is a work of true charity."

"I think I know that voice," said the priest.

"The priest of Nissard!"

"Even so, sir. I was seeking M. de Nid-de-Merle, and had but just learnt that he had been left behind wounded."

"You came to tell him of his sister?"

And as they rode together the priest related to Berenger that Madame de Selinville had remained in the same crushed, humiliated mood, not exactly penitent, but too much disappointed and overpowered with shame to heed that became of her provided she were not taken back to her brother or her aunt. She

knew that repentance alone was left for her, and permitted herself to be taken to Luçon, where Mère Monique was the only person whom she had ever respected. There had no doubt been germs of good within her, but the crime and intrigue of the siren court of Catherine de Medici had choked them; and the first sense of better things had been awakened by the frank simplicity of the young cousin, while, nevertheless, jealousy and family tactics had led her to aid in his destruction, only to learn through her remorse how much she loved him. And when in his captivity she thought him in her power, but found him beyond her reach, unhallowed as was her passion, yet still the contemplation of the virtues of one beloved could not fail to raise her standard. It was for his truth and purity that she had loved him, even while striving to degrade these qualities; and when he came forth from her ordeal unscathed, her worship of him might for a time be more intense, but when the idol was removed, the excellence she had first learnt to adore in him might yet lead that adoration up to the source of all excellence.

All that she sought *now* was shelter wherein to weep and cower unseen; but the priest believed that her tears would soon spring from profound depths of penitence such as often concluded the lives of the gay ladies of France. Mère Monique had received her tenderly, and the good priest had gone from Luçon to announce her fate to her aunt and brother.

At Bellaise he had found the Abbess much scandalized. She had connived at her niece's releasing the prisoner, for she had acquired too much regard for him to let him perish under Narcisse's hands, and she had allowed Véronique to personate Diane at the funeral mass, and also purposely detained Narcisse to prevent the detection of the escape; but the discovery

that her niece had accompanied his flight had filled her with shame and fury.

Pursuit had been made towards La Rochelle, but when the neighbourhood of the King of Navarre became known, no doubt was entertained that the fugitives had joined him, and Narcisse, reserving his vengeance for the family honour till he should encounter Berenger, had hotly resumed the intention of pouncing on Eustacie at Pont de Dronne, which had been decided on upon the report of the Italian spy, and only deferred by his father's death. This once done, Berenger's own supposed infidelity would have forced him to acquiesce in the annulment of the original marriage.

It had been a horrible gulf, and Berenger shuddered as one who had barely struggled to the shore, and found his dear ones safe, and his enemies shattered and helpless on the strand. They hurried on so as to be in time. The priest, a brave and cautious man, who had often before carried the rites of the Church to dying men in the midst of the enemy, was in a secular dress, and when Berenger had given the password, and obtained admittance, they separated, and only met again to cross the bridge. They found Osbert and Humfrey on guard, saying that the sufferer still lingered, occasionally in a terrible paroxysm of bodily anguish, but usually silent, except when he upbraided Osbert with his master's breach of promise or incapacity to bring a priest through his Huguenot friends.

Such a taunt was on his tongue when Père Colombeau entered, and checked the scoff by saying, "See, my son, you have met with more pardon and mercy even on earth than you had imagined possible."

There was a strange spasm on Narcisse's ghastly face, as though he almost regretted the obligation forced on him, but Berenger scarcely saw him again.

It was needful for the security of the priest and the tranquillity of the religious rites that he should keep watch outside, lest any of the more fanatical of the Huguenots should deem it their duty to break in on what they had worked themselves into believing offensive idolatry.

His watch did not prove uncalled for. At different times he had to plead the King's safe-conduct, and his own honour, and even to defend his own Protestantism by appealing to his wounds and services. Hearts were not soft enough then for the cruelty of disturbing a dying man to be any argument at all in that fierce camp; but even there the name of Père Colombeau met with respect. The saintly priest had protected too many enemies for any one who had heard of him to wish him ill.

Nearly all night was Berenger thus forced to remain on guard, that the sole hope of Narcisse's repentance and salvation might not be swept away by violence from without, renewing bitterness within. Not till towards morning was he called back. The hard, lingering death struggle had spent itself, and slow convulsive gasps showed that life was nearly gone; but the satanic sneer had passed away, and a hand held out, breathing like the word "pardon" seemed to be half uttered, and was answered from the bottom of Berenger's kind and pitying heart. Another quarter of an hour, and Narcisse de Ribaumont Nid-de-Merle was dead. The priest looked pale, exhausted, shocked, but would reveal nothing of the frame of mind he had shown, only that if he had been touched by any saving penitence, it was owing to his kinsman.

Berenger wished to send the corpse to rest in the family vault at Bellaise, where the Chevalier had so lately been laid; and the priest undertook to send persons with a flag of truce to provide for the transport,

as well as to announce the death to the sister and the aunt. Wearied as he was, he would not accept Berenger's earnest invitation to come and take rest and refreshment in the prior's rooms, but took leave of him at the further side of the fortress, with almost reverent blessings, as to one not far from the kingdom of heaven; and Berenger, with infinite peacefulness in his heart, went home in the silence of the Sunday morning, and lay sleeping away his long fatigue through the chief part of the day, while Pastor Merlin was preaching an eloquent sermon upon his good brother Isaac Gardon, and Eustacie shed filial tears, more of tenderness than sorrow.



"SET FORTH ON HORSEBACK . . . , RAYONETTE BEING
PERCHED BY TURNS IN FRONT OF HER FATHER
OR MOTHER"

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE GALLIMAFRE

"Speats and raxes, speats and raxes, speats and raxes."
Lord Somerville's billet.

NEVER wont to let the grass grow under his feet, Henry of Navarre was impatient of awaiting his troops at Pont de Dronne, and proposed to hasten on to Quinet, as a convenient centre for collecting the neighbouring gentry for conference. Thus, early on Monday, a party of about thirty set forth on horseback, including the Ribaumonts, Rayonette being perched by turns in front of her father or mother, and the Duke de Quinet declaring that he should do his best to divide the journey into stages not too long for Philip, since he was anxious to give his mother plenty of time to make preparations for her royal guest.

He had, however, little reckoned on the young King's promptitude. The first courier he had despatched was overtaken at a *cabaret* only five leagues from Pont de Dronne, baiting his horse, as he said; the second was found on the road with a lame horse; and the halt for the night was made so far on the way that only half a day's journey remained beyond it. The last stage had been ridden, much to the Duke's discontent, for it brought them to a mere village inn, with scarcely any accommodation. The only tolerable bed was resigned by the King to the use of Philip, whose looks spoke the exhaustion of which his tongue scorned to complain. So painful and feverish a night

ensued that Eustacie was anxious that he should not move until the Duke should, as he promised, send a mule litter back for him; but this proposal he resented; and in the height of his constitutional obstinacy, appeared booted and spurred at the first signal to mount.

Nor could Eustacie, as she soon perceived, annoy him more than by showing her solicitude for him, or attracting to him the notice of the other cavaliers. As the only lady of the party, she received a great deal of attention, with some of which she would gladly have dispensed. Whether it were the King's habit of calling her "*la Belle Eurydice*," or because, as she said, he was "*si laid*" and reminded her of old unhappy days of constraint, she did not like him and had almost displeased her husband and his brother by saying so. She would gladly have avoided the gallantries of this day's ride by remaining with Philip at the inn; but not only was this impossible, but the peculiar ill-temper of concealed suffering made Philip drive her off whenever she approached him with inquiries; so that she was forced to leave him to his brother and Osbert, and ride forward between the King and the Duke, the last of whom she really liked.

Welcome was the sight of the grand old château, its mighty wings of chestnut forest stretching up the hills on either side, and the stately avenue extending before it; but just then the last courier was discovered, reeling in his saddle under the effects of repeated toasts in honour of Navarre and Quinet.

"We are fairly sped," said the Duke to Eustacie, shrugging his shoulders between amusement and dismay.

"Madame la Duchesse is equal to any *gallimafré*," said Eustacie, demurely; at which the Duke laughed heartily, saying, "It is not for the family credit I fear, but for my own!"

"Nay, triumph makes everything be forgiven."

"But not forgotten," laughed the Duke. "But, *allons*. Now for the onset. We are already seen. The forces muster at the gateway."

By the time the cavalcade were at the great paved archway into the court, the Duchess stood at the great door, a grandson on either side, and a great burly fresh-coloured gentleman behind her.

M. de Quinet was off his horse in a second, his head bare, his hand on the royal rein, and signing to his eldest son to hold the stirrup; but, before the boy had comprehended, Henry had sprung down, and was kissing the old lady's hand, saying, "Pardon, Madame! I trust to your goodness for excusing this surprise from an old friend's son."

Neither seeing nor caring for King or prince, the stranger gentleman at the same moment pounced upon Eustacie and her little girl, crying aloud in English, "Here she is! My dear, I am glad to see you. Give her to me, poor Berenger's little darling. Ah! she does not understand. Where's Merrycourt?"

Just then there was another English exclamation, "My father! Father! dear father!" and Philip, flinging himself from the saddle, fell almost prone on that broad breast, sobbing convulsively, while the eyes that, as he truly boasted, had never wasted a tear on his enemies, were streaming so fast that his father's welcome savoured of reproof: "What's all this? Before these French too."

"Take care, father," cried Berenger, leaping from his horse; "he has an ugly wound just where you are holding him."

"Wounded! my poor boy. Look up."

"Where is your room, sir?" said Berenger, seeing his hosts entirely occupied with the King; and at once lifting the almost helpless Philip like a little child in

his strong arms, he followed Sir Marmaduke, who, as if walking in his sleep, led the way up the great stone staircase that led outside the house to the upper chambers.

After a short interval, the Duchess, in the plenitude of her glory at entertaining her dear Queen's son, came up *en grande tenue*, leading the King by the hand, the Duke walking backwards in front, and his two sons each holding a big wax candle on either side.

"Here, Sire, is the chamber where the excellent Queen did me the honour to repose herself."

The Duke swung open the door of the state bed-chamber. There, on the velvet-hung bed sat *le gros Chevalier Anglais*, whom she had herself installed there on Saturday. Both his hands were held fast in those of a youth who lay beside him, deadly pale, and half undressed, with the little Ribaumont attending to a wound in his side, while her child was held in the arms of a very tall, bald-headed young man, who stood at the foot of the bed. The whole group of interlopers looked perfectly glorified with happiness and delight. Even the wounded youth, ghastly and suffering as he was, lay stroking the big Englishman's hand with a languid, caressing air of content, almost like that of a dog who has found his master. None of them were the least embarrassed, they evidently thought this a visit of inquiry after the patient; and while the Duchess stood confounded, and the Duke much inclined to laugh, Eustacie turned eagerly, exclaiming, "Ah! Madame, I am glad you are come. May I beg Mademoiselle Perrot for some of your cooling mallow salve. Riding has sadly inflamed the wound."

"Riding—with such a wound! Are we all crazed?" said Madame la Duchesse, absolutely bewildered out of her dignified equanimity: and her son, seeing her for once at a loss, came to her rescue. "His grace will

condescend to the Andromeda Chamber, Madame. He kindly gave up his bed to our young friend last night, when there was less choice than you can give him."

They all moved off again; and, before Eustacie was ready for the mallows, Madame de Quinet, for whom the very name of a wound had an attraction, returned with two hand-maidens bearing bandages and medicaments, having by this time come to the perception that the wounded youth was the son of the big Englishman who had arrived with young Méricour in search of her little *protégée*, and that the tall man was the husband so long supposed to be dead. She was curious to see her pupil's surgery, of which she highly approved, though she had no words to express her indignation at the folly of travelling so soon. Indeed, nothing but the passiveness of fatigue could have made her despotism endurable to Philip; but he cared for nothing so long as he could see his father's face, and hear his voice—the full tones that his ear had yearned for among the sharp expression of the French accent—and Sir Marmaduke seemed to find the same perfect satisfaction in the sight of him; indeed, all were so rejoiced to be together, that they scarcely exerted themselves to ask questions. When Berenger would have made some explanation, Sir Marmaduke only said, "Tell me not yet, my dear boy. I see it is all right, and my head will hold no more yet but that I have you and the lad again! Thank God for it! Never mind how."

When, however, with some difficulty they got him away from Philip's bedside down to supper, the King came and made him high compliments upon the distinguished bravery of his sons, and Méricour interpreted, till Sir Marmaduke—though answering that of course the lads must do their duty, and he was only glad to hear they had done it—became more and more

radiant and proud, as he began to gather what their trials, and what their steadfastness and courage had been. His goodly face, beaming with honest gladness, was, as Henry told the Duchess, an absolute ornament to her table.

Unable, however, to converse with any one but Berenger and Méricour, and pining all the time to get back to his son, the lengthy and ceremonious meal was a weary penance to him; and so soon as his release was possible, he made his way upstairs again, where he found Philip much refreshed by a long sleep, and only afraid that he should find the sight of his father merely a dream; then, when satisfied on that head, eager to hear of all at home—"the sisters, the dogs, my mother, and my little brother?" as he arranged his inquiry.

"Ha! you heard of that, did you?"

"Yes," said Philip, "the villains gave us letters once—only once—and those what they thought would sting us most. O father, how could you all think such foul shame of Berry?"

"Don't speak of it, Phil; I never did, nor Aunt Cecily, not for a moment; but my Lord is not the man he was, and those foes of yours must have set abroad vile reports for the very purpose of deceiving us. And then this child must needs be born, poor little rogue. I shall be able to take to him now all is right again; but by St. George, they have tormented me so about him, and wanted me to take him as a providence to join the estates together, instead of you and Berry, that I never thought to care so little for a child of my own."

"We drank his health at Nid-de-Merle, and were not a little comforted that you would have him in our place."

"I'd rather—— Well, it skills not talking of it, but it just shows the way of women. After all the

outcry Dame Annora had made about her poor son, and no one loving him or heeding his interest save herself, no sooner was this little fellow born than she had no thought for any one but he, and would fain have had her father settle all his lands on him, protesting that if Berry lived, his French lands were enough for him. Out of sight, out of mind, is the way with women."

Womanhood was always made accountable for all Lady Thistlewood's follies, and Philip acquiesced, asking further, "Nay, but how came you hither, father? Was it to seek us or Eustacie?"

"Both, both, my lad. One morning just after Christmas, I rid over to Combe with my dame behind me, and found the house in commotion with a letter that young Sidney, Berry's friend, had just sent down by special messenger. It had been writ more than a year, but, bless you, these poor foreigners have such crooked ears and tongues that they don't know what to make of a plain man's name, and the only wonder was that it ever came at all. It seems the Duke here had to get it sent over by some of the secret agents the French Protestants have in England, and what do they do but send it to one of the Vivians in Cornwall; and it was handed about among them for how long I cannot say, till there was a chance of sending it up to my Lord of Warwick; and he, being able to make nothing of it, shows it to his nephew, Philip Sidney, who, perceiving at once whom it concerned, sends it straight to my Lord, with a handsome letter hoping that it brought good tidings. There then it was, and so we first knew that the poor lady had not been lost in the sack of the town, as Master Hobbs told us. She told us how this Duchess had taken her under her protection, but that her enemies were seeking her, and had even attempted her child's life."

"The ruffians! even so."

"And she said her old pastor was failing in health, and prayed that some trusty person might be sent to bring home at least the child to safety with her kindred. There was a letter to the same effect, praising her highly too, from the Duchess, saying that she would do her best to guard her, but the kinsmen had the law on their side, and she would be safer in England. Well, this was fair good news, save that we marvelled the more how you and Berry should have missed her; but the matter now was who was the trusty person who should go. Claude Merrycourt was ready——"

"How came he there?" demanded Philip. "I thought he had gone, or been sent off with Lady Burnett's sons."

"Why, so he had; but there's more to say on that score. He was so much in favour at Combe, that my Lord would not be denied his spending the holiday times there; and, besides, last summer we had a mighty coil. The Horners of Mells made me a rare good offer for Lucy for their eldest son, chiefly because they wanted a wife for him of my Lady Walwyn's and Mistress Cecily's breeding; and my wife was all for accepting it, having by that time given up all hope of poor Berry. But I would have no commands laid on my girl, seeing that I had pledged my word not to cross her in the matter, and she hung about my neck and prayed me so meekly to leave her unwedded, that I must have been made of stone not to yield to her. So I told Mr. Horner that his son Jack must wait for little Nancy if he wanted a daughter of mine—and the stripling is young enough. I believe he will. But women's tongues are not easy to stop, and Lucy was worn so thin, and had tears in her eyes—that she thought I never marked—when ever she was fretted or flouted, and at last I took

her back to stay at Combe for Aunt Cecily to cheer up a bit; and—well, well, to get rid of the matter and silence Dame Nan, I consented to a betrothal between her and Merrycourt—since she vowed she would rather wait single for him than wed any one else. He is a good youth, and is working himself to a shadow between studying and teaching; but as to sending him alone to bring Berry's wife back, he was overyoung for that. No one could do that fitly save myself, and I only wish I had gone three years ago, to keep you two foolish lads out of harm's way. But they set up an unheard-of hubbub, and made sure I should lose myself. What are you laughing at, you Jacksauce?"

"To think of you starting, father, with not a word of French, and never from home further than once to London."

"Ah! you thought to come the travelled gentleman over me, but I've been even with you. I made Dame Nan teach me a few words, but I never could remember anything but that 'mercy' is 'thank ye.' However, Merrycourt offered to come with me, and my Lord wished it. Moreover, I thought he might aid in tracing you out. So I saw my Lord alone, and he passed his word to me that, come what would, no one should persuade him to alter his will to do wrong to Berenger's daughter; and so soon as Master Hobbs could get the *Throstle* unladen, and fitted out again, we sailed for Bordeaux, and there he is waiting for us, while Claude and I bought horses and hired a guide, and made our way here on Saturday, where we were very welcome; and the Duchess said she would but wait till she could learn there was no bands of the enemy at hand, to go down with me herself to the place where she had sent the lady. A right worthy dame is this same Duchess, and a stately; and that

young King, as they call him, seems hard to please, for he told Berry that his wife's courtliness and ease in his reception were far above aught that he found here. What he means is past a plain man, for as to Berry's wife she is handy, and notable enough, and 'tis well he loves her so well; but what a little brown thing it is, for a man to have gone through such risks for. Nothing to look at beside his mother!"

"If you could only see Madame de Selinville!" sighed Philip—then. "Ah! sir, you would know the worth of Eustacie had you seen her in yonder town."

"Very like!" said Sir Marmaduke; "but after all our fears at home of a fine court madam, it takes one aback to see a little homely brown thing, clad like a serving wench. Well, Dame Nan will not be displeased, she always said the girl would grow up no beauty, and 'tis the way of women to brook none fairer than themselves! Better so. She is a good Protestant, and has done rarely by you, Phil."

"Truly, I might be glad 'twas no court madam that stood by me when Berry was called back to the fight: and for the little one, 'tis the loveliest and bravest little maid I ever saw. Have they told you of the mari-golds, father?"

"Why, the King told the whole to the Duchess, so Berry said, and then drank the health of the daughter of the bravest of knights; and Berry held her up in his arms to bow again, and drink to them from his glass. Berry looked a proud man, I can tell you, and a comely, spite of his baldness; and 'tis worth having come here to see how much you lads are thought of—though to be sure 'tis not often the poor creatures here see so much of an Englishman as we have made of Berry."

Philip could not but laugh. "'Tis scarce for that that they value him, sir."

"Say you so? Nay, methinks his English heart and

yours did them good service. Indeed, the King himself told me as much by the mouth of Merrycourt. May that youngster's head only not be turned! Why, they set him at table above Berenger, and above half the King's gentlemen. Even the Duchess makes as if he were one of her highest guests—he a poor Oxford scholar, doubting if he can get his bread by the law, and flouted as though he were not good enough for my daughter. 'Tis the world topsy turvy, sure enough! And that this true love that Berenger has run through fire and water after, like a knight in a pedlar's ballad, should turn out a mere little, brown, common-looking woman after all, not one whit equal to Lucy!"

Sir Marmaduke modified his disappointment a little that night, when he had talked Philip into a state of feverishness and suffering that became worse under Madame de Quinet's reproofs and remedies, and only yielded to Eustacie's long and patient soothing. He then could almost have owned that it was well she was not like his own cherished type of womanhood, and the next day he changed his opinion still more, even as to her appearance.

There was a great gathering of favourers of the Huguenot cause on that day; gentlemen came from all parts to consult with Henry of Navarre, and Madame de Quinet had too much sense of the fitness of things to allow Madame de Ribaumont to appear at the ensuing banquet in her shabby, rusty black serge, and tight white borderless cap. The whole wardrobe of the poor young Duchess de Quinet was placed at her service, and though with the thought of her adopted father on her heart, she refused gay colours, yet when, her toilette complete, she sailed into Philip's room, he almost sprang up in delight, and Sir Marmaduke rose and ceremoniously bowed as to a stranger, and was

only undeceived when little Rayonette ran joyously to Philip, asking if *Maman* was not *si belle, si belle*.

The effects of her unrestful nights had now passed away, and left her magnificent eyes in their full brilliancy and arch fire; the blooming glow was restored to her cheek; and though neck, brow, and hands were browner than in the shelter of convent or palace, she was much nearer to absolute beauty than in former days, both from countenance and from age. Her little proud head was clustered with glossy locks of jet, still short, but curling round her brow and neck whose warm brunette tints contrasted well with the delicate, stiffened cobweb of her exquisite standing ruff, which was gathered into a white satin bodice, with a skirt of the same material, over which swept a rich black brocade train open in front, with an open body and half-sleeves with falling lace, and the hands, delicate and shapely as ever, if indeed a little tanned, held fan and handkerchief with as much courtly grace as though they had never stirred broth nor wrung out linen. Sir Marmaduke really feared he had the court madam on his hands after all, but he forgot all about his fears, as she stood laughing and talking, and by her pretty airs and gestures, smiles and signs, making him enter into her mirth with Philip, almost as well as if she had not spoken French.

Even Berenger stared, when he came up after the counsel to fetch her to the banqueting-hall. She was more entirely the Eustacie of the Louvre than he had ever realized seeing her, and yet so much more; and when the Duchess beheld the sensation she produced among the *noblesse*, it was with self-congratulation in having kept her in retirement while it was still not known that she was not a widow. The King of Navarre had already found her the only lady present possessed of the peculiar aroma of high-breeding

which belonged to the society in which both he and she had been most at home, and his attentions were more than she liked from one whose epithet of Eurydice she had never quite forgiven; at least, that was the only reason she could assign for her distaste, but the Duchess understood her better than did Berenger, nay, better than she did herself, and kept her under the maternal wings of double form and ceremony.

Berenger, meanwhile, was in great favour. A command had been offered him by the King of Navarre, who had promised that if he would cast in his lot with the Huguenots, his claims on all the lands of Ribaultmont should be enforced on the King of France when terms were wrung from him, and Narcisse's death removed all valid obstacle to their recognition; but Berenger felt himself bound by all home duties to return to England, nor had he clear convictions as to the absolute right of the war in which he had almost unconsciously drawn his sword. Under the Tudors the divine right of kings was strongly believed in, and it was with many genuine misgivings that the cause of Protestant revolt was favoured by Elizabeth and her ministers; and Berenger, bred up in a strong sense of loyalty, as well as in doctrines that, as he had received them, savoured as little of Calvinism as of Romanism, was not ready to espouse the Huguenot cause with all his heart; and as he could by no means have fought on the side of King Henry III. or of the Guises, felt thankful that the knot could be cut by renouncing France altogether, according to the arrangement which had been defeated by the Chevalier's own super-subtle machinations.

At the conference of gentlemen held at Quinet, he had been startled by hearing the name of the Sieur de Bellaise, and had identified him with a grave, thin, noble-looking man, with an air of high-bred and pa-

tient poverty. He was a Catholic but no Guisard, and supported the middle policy of the Montmorency party, so far as he possessed any influence; but his was only the weight of personal character, for he had merely a small property that had descended to him through his grandmother, the wife of the unfortunate Bellaise who had pined to death in the dungeon of Loches, under Louis XI. Here, then, Berenger saw the right means of ridding himself and his family of the burthen that his father had mourned over, and it only remained to convince Eustacie. Her first feeling when she heard of the King's offer, was that at last her ardent wish would be gratified, she should see her husband at the head of her vassals, and hear the war-cry motto, "*A moi Ribaumont.*" Then came the old representation that the Vendéen peasants were faithful Catholics who could hardly be asked to fight on the Calvinist side. The old spirit rose in a flush, a pout, a half-uttered query why those creatures should be allowed their opinions. Madame la Baronne was resuming her haughty temperament in the *noblesse* atmosphere; but in the midst came the remembrance of having made that very speech in her Temple ruin—of the grave sad look of rebuke and shake of the head with which the good old minister had received it—and how she had sulked at him till forced to throw herself on him to hinder her separation from her child. She burst into tears, and as Berenger, in some distress, began to assure her that he would and could do nothing without her consent, she struggled to recover voice to say, "No! no! I only grieve that I am still as wicked as ever, after these three years with that saint, my dear father. Do as you will, only pardon me, the little fierce one!"

And then, when she was made to perceive that her husband would have to fight alone, and could not take

her with him to share his triumphs or bind his wounds, at least not except by bringing her in contact with Henry of Navarre and that atmosphere of the old court, she acquiesced the more readily. She was a woman who could feel but not reason; and, though she loved Nid-de-Merle, and had been proud of it, Berenger's description of the ill-used *Sieur de Bellaise* had the more effect on her, because she well remembered the traditions whispered among the peasants with whom her childhood had been passed, that the village crones declared nothing had gone well with the place since the *Bellaises* had been expelled, with a piteous tale of the broken-hearted lady, that she had never till now understood.

For the flagrant injustice perpetrated on her uncle and cousin in the settlement on Berenger and herself she cared little, thinking they had pretty well repaid themselves, and not entering into Berenger's deeper view, that this injustice was the more to be deplored as the occasion of their guilt; but she had no doubt or question as to the grand stroke of yielding up her claims on the estate to the *Sieur de Bellaise*. The generosity of the deed struck her imagination, and if Berenger would not lead her vassals to battle, she did not want them. There was no difficulty with Sir Marmaduke; he only vowed that he liked Berenger's wife all the better for being free of so many yards of French dirt tacked to her petticoat, and Philip hated the remembrance of those red sugar-loaf pinnacles far too much not to wish his brother to be rid of them.

M. de Bellaise, when once he understood that restitution was intended, astonished Sir Marmaduke by launching himself on Berenger's neck with tears of joy; and Henry of Navarre, though sorry to lose such a partisan as the young Baron, allowed that the *Bellaise* claims, being those of a Catholic, might serve to keep

out some far more dangerous person whom the Court party might select in opposition to an outlaw and a Protestant like M. de Ribaumont.

"So you leave us," he said in private to Berenger, to whom he had taken a great liking. "I cannot blame you for not casting your lot into such a witch's cauldron as this poor country. My friends think I dallied at court like Rinaldo in Armida's garden. They do not understand that when one hears the name of Bourbon one does not willingly make war with the Crown, still less that the good Calvin left a doctrine bitter to the taste, and tough of digestion. May be, since I have been forced to add my spoon to stir the cauldron, it may clear itself; if so, you will remember that you have rights in Normandy and Picardy."

This was the royal farewell. Henry and his suite departed the next morning, but the Duchess insisted on retaining her other guests till Philip's cure should be complete. Meantime, Claude de Méricour had written to his brother and arranged a meeting with him. He was now no boy who could be coerced, but a staid, self-reliant, scholarly person, with a sword by his side and an English passport to secure him, and his brother did not regard him as quite the disgrace to his family he had at first deemed him. He was at least no rebel; and though the law seemed to French eyes infinitely beneath the dignity of a scion of nobility, still it was something not to have him a heretic preacher, and to be able at least to speak of him as betrothed to the sister of the Baron de Ribaumont. Moreover, that Huguenot kinsman, whose extreme Calvinist opinions had so nearly revolted Méricour, had died and left him all his means, as the only Protestant in the family; and the amount, when Claude arranged matters with his brother, proved to be sufficient to bear him through his expenses handsomely as

a student, with the hope of marriage so soon as he should have kept his terms at the Temple.

And thus the good ship *Throstle* bore home the whole happy party to Weymouth, and good Sir Marmaduke had an unceasing cause for exultation in the brilliant success of his mission to France.

After all, the first to revisit that country was no other than the once homesick Philip. He wearied of inaction, and thought his country neighbours ineffably dull and lubberly, while they blamed him for being a fine, Frenchified gentleman, even while finding no fault with their old friend Berenger, or that notable little, lively, housewifely lady his wife, whose broken English and bright simplicity charmed everyone.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE MOONBEAM CHILD

“Remember since you owed no more to time
Than I do now: with thought of your affections,
Step forth, mine advocate; at your request,
My father will grant precious things, as trifles.”

Winter's Tale.

SORELY Philip needed something to do; he might have been a gentleman pensioner, but he had no notion, he said, of loitering after a lady to boat and hunt, when such a king as Henry of Navarre was in the field; and he agreed with Eustacie in her estimate of the Court, that it was horribly dull, and wanting in all the sparkle and brilliancy that even he had perceived at Paris.

Eustacie gladly retreated to housewifery at Combe Walwyn, but a strenuous endeavour on Lady Thistlewood's part to marry her stepson to a Dorset knight's daughter, together with the tidings of the renewed war in France, spurred Philip into wringing permission from his father to join the King of Navarre as a volunteer.

Years went by, and Philip was heard of only in occasional letters, accompanied by presents to his sisters and to little Rayonette, and telling of marches, exploits, and battles—how he had taken a standard of the League at Coutras, and how he had led a charge of pikemen at Ivry, for which he received the thanks of Henry IV. But, though so near home, he did not set foot on English ground till the throne of France

was secured to the hero of Navarre, and he had marched into Paris in guise very unlike the manner he had left it.

Then home he came, a bronzed gallant-looking warrior, the pride of the county, ready for repose and for aid to his father in his hearty old age, and bearing with him a pressing invitation from the King to Monsieur and Madame de Ribau mont to resume their rank at Court. Berenger, who had for many years only known himself as Lord Walwyn, shook his head. "I thank the King," he said, "but I am better content to breed up my children as wholly English. He bade me to return when he should have stirred the witch's cauldron into clearness. Alas! all he has done is to make brilliant colours shine on the vapour thereof. Nay, Phil; I know your ardent love for him, and marvel not at it. Before he joined the Catholic Church I trusted that he might have given truth to the one party, and unity to the other; but when the clergy accepted him with all his private vices, and he surrendered unconditionally, I lost hope. I fear there is worse in store. Queen Catherine did her most fatal work of evil when she corrupted Henry of Navarre."

"If you say more, Berry, I shall be ready to challenge you!" said Philip. "When you saw him, you little knew the true king of souls that he is, his greatness, or his love for his country."

"Nay, I believe it; but tell me, Philip, did you not hint that you had been among former friends—at Luçon, you said, I think?"

Philip's face changed. "Yes; it was for that I wished to see you alone. My troop had to occupy the place. I had to visit the convent to arrange for quartering my men so as least to scandalize the sisters. The Abbess came to speak to me. I knew her only by her eyes! She is changed—aged, wan, thin with

their discipline and fasts—but she once or twice smiled as she alone in old times could smile. The place rings with her devotion, her charity, her penances, and truly her face is”—he could hardly speak—“like that of a saint. She knew me at once, asked for you all, and bade me tell you that *now* she prays for you and yours continually, and blesses you for having opened to her the way of peace. Ah! Berry, I always told you she had not her equal.”

“Think you so even now?”

“How should I not, when I have seen what repentance has made of her?”

“So!” said Berenger, rather sorrowfully, “our great Protestant champion has still left his heart behind him in a French convent.”

“Stay, Berenger! do you remember yonder villain conjurer’s prediction that I should wed none but a lady whose cognizance was the leopard?”

“And you seem bent on accomplishing it,” said Berenger.

“Nay! but in another manner—that which you devised on the spur of the moment. Berenger, I knew the sorcerer spake sooth when that little moonbeam child of yours brought me the flowers from the rampart. I had speech with her last night. She has all the fair loveliness that belongs of right to your mother’s grandchild, but her eye, blue as it is, has the Ribaumont spirit; the turn of the head and the smile are what I loved long ago in yonder lady, and, above all, she is her own sweet self. Berenger, give me your daughter Bérengère, and I ask no portion with her but the silver bullet. Keep the pearls for your son’s heirloom; all I ask with Rayonette is the silver bullet.”

THE END

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